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ABSTRACT

Noting that the school curriculum is in daily competition with the "alternative curriculum" of the popular media, this teacher's guide presents over 100 classroom activity units to bring purpose and critical interactions to children's encounters with the media. The first section of the guide presents a base for starting to "read" the media, including a set of literate values, a Unesco declaration on media education, a guide to critical "reading" of television, and four basic questions for the viewer to ask when "reading" a television item. The next four sections then present activities for critical viewing of television and television advertising, radio listening, and newspaper reading. The remaining three sections discuss developing a media studies program, sample letters to parents regarding the media studies program, and a list of resources for instructional materials on the media. (HTH)

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Learning to Read the Media

A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO MEDIA EDUCATION

BARRY DWYER and BOB WALSHE

Cover and illustrations by Dorothy Dunphy

PRIMARY ENGLISH TEACHING ASSOCIATION

Acknowledgments

This book began with a manuscript I had completed and handed over to PETA's long-time editor Bob Walshe. The subject is one that he has often worked on and he made so many suggestions that we decided to take the whole thing apart and rewrite it as an intensely practical sequence of classroom activities, sharing authorship equally.

We are especially grateful to Dorothy Dunphy ('DAD') for entering into the spirit of the book and, with accustomed professionalism, producing its cartoons, diagrams and cover, confidently making specific what were often vague images in the authors' minds.

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Barry Dwyer

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Look—
the classroom walls are cracked!

'Today . . . most learning occurs outside the classroom. The sheer quantity of information conveyed by press-magazines-film-TV-radio far exceeds the quantity of information conveyed by school instruction and texts. This challenge has destroyed the monopoly of the book as a teaching aid and cracked the very walls of the classroom.'

Marshall McLuhan

TELEVISION

NEWSPAPERS

Education Daily

RADIO

SCHOOL CURRICULUM UNDER SIEGE

MAGAZINES

ADVERTISING

The children are looking to other teachers outside the classroom

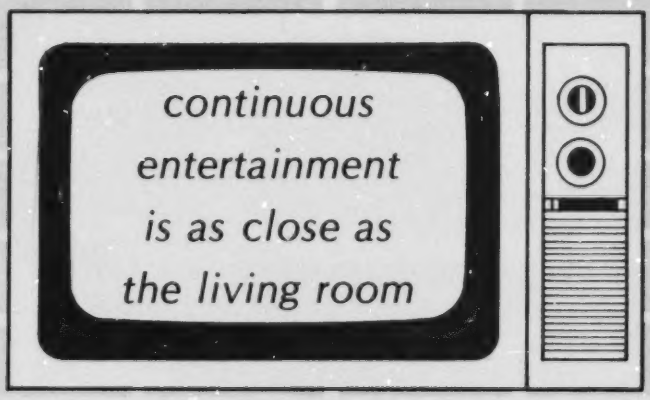
- The mass media have become children's 'Other Teachers'.
- TV is the main 'Other Teacher' . . . many children have viewed 5000 hours of TV before they enrol at school; from at least age 3 a child can give fairly concentrated attention to TV; between 3 and 5 a child has favourite programs and acquires strong wants from ads.

Some children—but only a minority—are fortunate to have 'other teachers' in the person of one or both parents, who regularly show them things, talk with them, read to them.

TELEVISION

NEWSPAPERS

RADIO



MAGAZINES

ADVERTISING

The school curriculum is in competition daily with an 'alternative curriculum'

- The mass media present an 'alternative curriculum'—through TV, radio, video, magazines, newspapers—a body of information aimed at influencing the young.
- TV in particular offers a comprehensive though scattered curriculum of pictures, stories, information, and values—more attractive, more accessible than the school curriculum.
- Between ages 5-18, most children will spend more hours with TV than with teachers.

Which curriculum is today the main one—that of the school or the media? If more 'learning' is now taking place outside the classroom, perhaps it is the school curriculum that should be termed the 'alternative curriculum'?

TELEVISION

NEWSPAPERS

RADIO

MAGAZINES

ADVERTISING

But the media's 'curriculum' is disconnected and purposeless—in some respects even harmful

TV is chiefly entertainment mixed with commercial persuasion, a 'fragmented curriculum' of unsequenced shows and ads, and behind its easy, undemanding pictures and stories it is loaded with implied 'message'—attitudes, opinions, values.

- The media stress entertainment, easily aroused interest, a relaxed and effortless lifestyle.
- The schools, by contrast, call for study, effort, a self-disciplined and purposeful lifestyle.

What chance do children have?
How can they cope when so many media messages tempt them from study to a trivial lifestyle?

TELEVISION

NEWSPAPERS

RADIO

MAGAZINES

ADVERTISING

So the school curriculum needs to help the child bring purpose to the 'alternative curriculum'

- *Children*, unaided, are obviously too young and too uncritical to cope with the negative aspects of the media.
- *Parents*, except for a minority, are unable or unwilling to exercise enlightened supervision of their children's viewing, listening, reading.
- *Teachers*, however, can help all children build an understanding needed for critical appreciation of the media. (If the teachers don't do so, the job won't be done!)

Only a critical *individual* can cope intelligently with the media, using what is positive, criticising what is negative, and so controlling his or her own mind!

Children don't need to learn anything before being able to view TV, but they certainly need to learn how to become decently critical of TV (and other media)— they need to LEARN TO 'READ' THE MEDIA.

NOW I'M DOING MEDIA STUDIES I REALISE THAT MUM AND DAD ARE BOTH MEDIA ILLITERATES!

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A Base for Starting to 'Read' the Media

Argument: To have any hope of coping with the mass media, children need, first, a helpful and knowledgeable *guide* and, second, a continually developing *base* of values from which to 'read' media performances . . . Ideally, parents should provide such guidance, but not many do. The responsibility therefore falls to the teachers—there is no one else! They must proceed from the values base they know, namely the literate values.

Judging the mass media isn't easy, for they are so varied, so omnipresent, so often just 'good entertainment'. Children unaided have no chance of evaluating the media effectively, and their teachers generally feel too busy to pay the problem due attention.

An impasse?

If teachers are to be equipped to help children arrive at informed and critical attitudes to the media, they will need three items of 'equipment':

- *A SET OF VALUES* from which to judge the performances of the media;
- *A THEORY* on the place of the modern mass media in education and life;
- *A METHOD* of handling 'media education' that fits it into present timetables.

These prerequisites have not been achieved by past attempts, however valiant, to add a new subject termed 'Media Studies' to the already overloaded curriculum.

This book proposes a different approach: that we should look *within* the existing practice of the schools and show that most consideration of the media can be incorporated into the normal curriculum of talking, reading, writing, social studies, science, maths, art, crafts and other activities *as worthy subject matter*, all without increasing overall curriculum content . . . Indeed, not just 'worthy' but *vital* to modern times and children's daily experience.

1. A Set of Values

Children even more than adults suffer from the modern crisis in values. They grow up in an 'age of complexity', a 'permissive society', a 'world of accelerating change and future shock'. How can their teachers offer them a set of values as a base for media criticism without risking a charge of sectarian or political intent?

A powerful answer, assured of acceptance in a democratic society, is that *literate values*[1] can provide that base: the values engendered in our culture by several centuries of literacy teaching and mass uses of literacy.

The chart on the next page attempts a summary of the literate values.

Historically, mass literacy became *possible* around the 5th century B.C. when the Greeks invented the first largely phonetic alphabet; but literacy did not begin to spread widely until printing set up a need for it in 16th century Europe.

Schools arose increasingly from the 16th century onward as the mass agents for spreading literacy. Reading and writing have remained the core concern of the

[1] The term 'literate values' should not be confused with another term 'literary criticism' ('lit. crit.') which applies to the often contending views of a number of schools of thought as to the best approach to the criticism of a novel, play or other literary form. There are of course other values systems besides the literate values: religious values, for instance, such as those of Christianity or Islam; or the secular values of ideologies such as Liberalism or Marxism.

A Summary of
The Literate Values

1. *Reading and Writing admirably extend human awareness:*
   they provide access to huge areas of knowledge;
   they cultivate sequential, ordered, objective thought;
   they help thought go deeper than is possible without them;
   they favour pondering and careful deliberation;
   they facilitate reconsideration and revision of ideas.

2. *Reading and Writing strengthen individuality:*
   they are essentially personal, thoughtful activities;
   they need some self-discipline, and they reward studiousness;
   they confer a power of self-improvement on the individual;
   they foster a deeper sensitivity to the human condition;
   they help to fashion an informed, critical citizenry which respects individual freedom and democracy.

3. *Readers and Writers value language and literature:*
   language for its ability to articulate human experience;
   literature for its expression of experience and imagination;
   books for their variety, portability and convenience;
   schools for their cradling of literacy and literature;
   the 'humanities'—the language-based subjects—for their knowledge of civilised society;
   the sciences (which have proliferated since the print revolution) for their growing understanding of the environment.

These values are a rational base from which the individual can proceed to an intelligent, critical 'reading' of the products of the modern mass media, including by degrees attention to each medium's own specific characteristics, its so-called 'language' or 'grammar' (e.g. TV's striving to 'let the pictures tell the story', with no words or as few as possible).

schools to this day. The four centuries of 'book learning' since the rise of print communication have understandably served to breed literate values into the bone of schooling.

Literacy, it needs to be said, is more than the 'basic skills' of reading and writing. It extends to the *culture* we have inherited from the long period of mass reading and writing and even includes the capacity to discuss the new knowledge born of the print revolution.

From another viewpoint, literacy is a *power* the school offers to the child, one which, when sufficiently learned, enables the individual to take over his or her further learning and advance it as far as desired. It is a power, moreover, which can help individuals in our complex times to overcome the sense of ineffectualness and passivity induced by many modern forces, among which the mass media, and television in particular, are prominent.

2. A Theory on the Place of the Modern Mass Media

Just as history helps in finding values from which to judge new media, so it can help in the setting up of a theory for relating the uses of new media to old.

Humanity's first medium of communication was speech. It was supplemented five thousand years ago by writing in a variety of manually executed forms. Then, four centuries ago, by printing. None of these media ever threatened completely to supplant any other; each has continued to have its uses.

This suggests a positive attitude to new media. The schools must neither turn their backs on new media nor become so entranced with them as to neglect the old. All can be used to advantage, bringing an expansion of consciousness and knowledge, provided an intelligent balance is struck between them. Though this isn't easy!

So we need to conserve and value the uses of talking-listening, handwriting and printing while we proceed to use, educationally and personally, television, radio, video, computers and whatever is yet to come. To do so demands a policy—or more specifically a *method*—by which 'media education' is integrated into the existing curriculum.

3. A Method of Media Education

While everyone has long acknowledged that the mass media exercise powerful and sometimes harmful effects on children, few teachers have as yet adopted a confident classroom policy on 'media education'. Why? Not only because they have been uncertain of the *values* by which the media should be judged but also, surely, because they have felt there is no time in an already overcrowded day to attend to them.

This book proposes that every effort should be made to *integrate* 'media education' into existing courses right across the curriculum; at present this seems more realistic for most schools than to propose the addition of a separate media course. That is to say, the study of the mass media should be thought of as offering important and legitimate subject matter which has a right to take the place of some present topics or parts of topics whenever the new subject matter seems to be of greater value.

Some examples. Oral and Written Expression can often pay attention to current media programs. Reading Time can include comparison of novels and stories with TV drama. Social Studies can explore the role of the media in society. English and Social Studies can take up criticism of advertising. English can experiment with comparative

stage, TV and radio scripting. Maths can measure aspects of modern communications. Art can look into filming techniques. And so on.

While helping the children to 'read' the new media in the light of literate values, the teacher will be aware that each medium has its specific characteristics, which are often referred to as a distinctive 'language'. The teacher will therefore also help the children to 'read' such languages—to become 'literate' in them—appreciating what is wholesome or uplifting and criticising what is shoddy or harmful.

UNESCO Declaration on Media Education

This important Declaration was issued unanimously by the representatives of 19 countries attending Unesco's 1982 International Symposium on Media Education.

'*We live in a world where media are omnipresent*: an increasing number of people spend a great deal of time watching television, reading newspapers and magazines, playing records and listening to the radio. In some countries, for example, children already spend more time watching television than they do attending school.

'Rather than condemn or endorse the undoubted power of the media, we need to accept their significant impact and penetration throughout the world as an established fact, and also appreciate their importance as an element of culture in today's world. The role of communication and media in the process of development should not be underestimated, nor the function of media as instruments for the citizen's active participation in society. Political and educational systems need to recognise their obligations to promote in their citizens a critical understanding of the phenomena of communication.

'Regrettably most formal and non-formal educational systems do little to promote media education or education for communication. Too often the gap between the educational experience they offer and the real world in which people live is disturbingly wide. But if the arguments for media education as a preparation for responsible citizenship are formidable now, in the very near future with the development of communication technology such as satellite broadcasting, two-way cable systems, television data systems, video cassette and disc materials, they ought to be irresistible, given the increasing degree of choice in media consumption resulting from these developments.

'Responsible educators will not ignore these developments, but will work alongside their students in understanding them and making sense of such consequences as the rapid development of two-way communication and the ensuing individualisation and access to information.

'This is not to underestimate the impact on cultural identity of the flow of information and ideas between cultures by the mass media.

'The school and the family share the responsibility of preparing the young person for living in a world of powerful images, words and sounds. Children and adults need to be literate in all three of these symbolic systems, and this will require some reassessment of educational priorities. Such a reassessment might well result in an integrated approach to the teaching of language and communication.

'Media education will be most effective when parents, teachers, media personnel and decision-makers all acknowledge they have a role to play in developing greater critical awareness among listeners, viewers and readers. The greater integration of educational and communications systems would undoubtedly be an important step towards more effective education.'

'*We therefore call upon the competent authorities to*:

'1. initiate and support comprehensive media education programs—from pre-school to university level, and in adult education—the purpose of which is to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes which will encourage the growth of critical awareness and, consequently, of greater competence among the users of electronic and print media. Ideally, such programs should include the analysis of media products, the use of media as means of creative expression, and effective use of and participation in available media channels;
2. develop training courses for teachers and intermediaries both to increase their knowledge and understanding of the media and train them in appropriate teaching methods, which would take into account the already considerable but fragmented acquaintance with media already possessed by many students;
3. stimulate research and development activities for the benefit of media education, from such domains as psychology, sociology, and communication science;
4. support and strengthen the actions undertaken or envisaged by U.N.E.S.C.O. and which aim at encouraging international cooperation in media education.'

Gruenwald, Federal Republic of Germany, 22 January 1982

The Intelligent Viewer's Guide to Critical 'Reading' of Television Productions

The diagram opposite presents the four questions basic to an intelligent viewer's response to any program. A TV program is 'constructed' by a production team over a more or less lengthy period, BUT a viewer has a relatively hurried task—that of critically 'deconstructing' it during and immediately after presentation. In other words, of 'reading' it and responding to it intelligently.

Q.1: 'Who constructed it—and why?'

- What ownership lies behind the program and the channel?
- What constraints may have been felt by the production team (e.g. ideology of the owners, channel policy, public opinion, ratings, finance, time)?
- What motives other than entertainment (e.g. profit, political persuasion)?
- What advertising, if any, is associated with the program?
- Is the production team known for high standards, artistic integrity?

Q.2: 'How did they put it together?'

- What genre is this (e.g. documentary, soap opera, variety)?
- How has this 'process of meaning-making' (visual/verbal/sound) been achieved: scripting, sets, acting, language, costuming, music, sound-effects, camera-work, graphics, direction, sequencing, editing?
- Is any originality of technique in evidence? or any cliches?
- Is the acting/performing skilful—a naturalness achieved?

Q.3: 'What is it about?'

- What, in general, is the subject or problem?
- Is there a central message or theme?
- Are there implied or hidden messages/values (e.g. that all politicians are go-getters; or that the best people are white, well-to-do, conservative and churchgoers)?
- Does it raise unanswered questions?
- Has it omitted, skirted, or disparaged relevant issues?

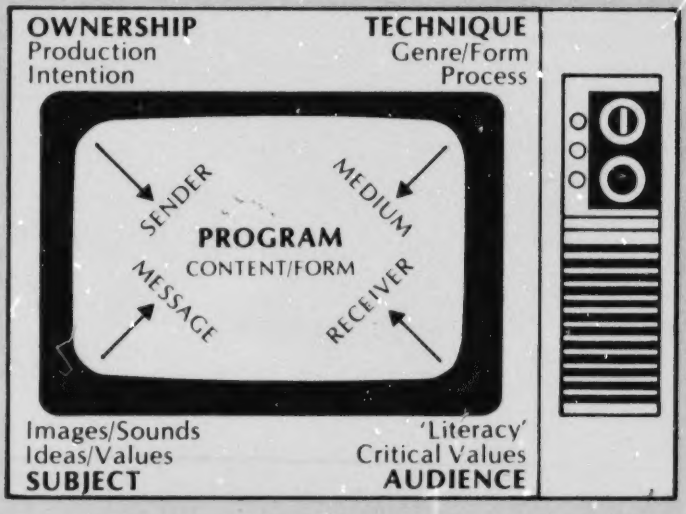
Q.4: 'What do I think of it?'

- Passably entertaining—or should I think more deeply about it?
- What knowledge of my own can I bring to the subject?
- Should I bring certain critical values to bear on it?
- Feeling unsure, why don't I just start questioning aspects of it?
- Is it technically good but deficient in story/content?
- Potentially good story/content spoilt by poor presentation?
- Will discussion or writing help me make up my mind?

'Reading' a TV Item

Who constructed it—and why?

How did they put it together?



What is it about?

What do I think of it?

The Four Basics of a Balanced Approach to 'Reading' Television

10 Introductory 'Readings' of TV

Class discussions can prompt children to *articulate* their feelings about TV and *reason* about their responses to particular programs.

Often class discussion will lead to activities such as

- *division into small groups* to tackle particular problems;
- *writing* in order to arrive at an individual opinion;
- *reading* about some point of interest;
- *research* into a major issue;
- *reporting back* after reading, research or writing;
- *technical activities*, e.g. scripting, dramatising, camera work.

Here are ten such 'readings'. They are adaptable to every age/grade level. Each begins with a question to which this class of young viewers can be asked to give unprompted answers. For the teacher's reference a checklist of points is provided under most questions.

If this question is raised without prior reference to TV, it will produce a wide-ranging discussion of how members of the class, and people they know, spend their leisure time. The mere listing of activities will fill a chalkboard. TV is sure to figure prominently in the comments. The teacher can then draw out three inferences:

(1) That TV very pleasurably takes up a large part of most people's leisure time. ('What did people do before TV, i.e. before 1956-7?')

(2) That to spend hours (?) in front of TV is to cut down on all those other possible activities listed on the board. ('What would you choose to do in the time saved if you didn't watch any TV?')

(3) That TV is such a heavy consumer of time that we should discuss our attitudes to it in a series of further talks. *Announce a time for the next talk and the question to be discussed, so there is time for pondering and for raising the question at home.* (N.B. This Probe will be returned to on a much higher level at the end of the course—see Probe 29.)

Adapt probes to your class's level.

Get the class discussing different viewing habits—their own and those of other members of the family, also friends and neighbours. Tell them what you watch. Use, if you wish, any of the points made in the quotation below. Try to draw from the discussion a realisation that not everyone watches TV undiscriminatingly—that there are many families who use it moderately yet keenly, so as to gain good things from it, but do not allow it to dominate their lives: 'Yes, TV is of some importance to us, but we make sure that we use TV—TV doesn't use us!'

'During their schooling [to Year 12], these same children will complete 11,500 hours of formal education. They will also experience at least 15,000 hours of films and television alone, an experience sometimes referred to as the "unsupervised classroom". They will have witnessed some 18,000 murders, committed by every known means of disposal. They will have viewed and listened to 500,000 advertisements and watched seven times more films than they have read books. Apart from film, television and radio they will have spent some time reading newspapers, comics, and weekly magazines. Their total exposure to media messages will be about 20,000 hours. This represents almost double the amount of time they spend at school.

'So much involvement with the communications media must inevitably influence children's development. These children will be determining tomorrow's society, and so it follows that tomorrow's society is being moulded by today's media.'—*R-12 Media Studies*, Education Department of S.A., 1983, p. 2.

- It is easy to follow.
- It is relaxing.
- It is company for the lonely and bored.
- It can be entertaining, informative, sometimes exciting.
- It can bring new ideas, a wide view of the world.
- It can raise matters worth talking about with family or friends.
- It can be directly or indirectly educational.

TV isn't bad *in itself* but there are certainly bad programs, bad choices of programs, and bad viewing habits.

- TV is all too easy, tempting, available.
- It tempts us to be passive 'watchers' rather than 'doers'.
- It moves so quickly we have little chance to criticise it.
- It seldom prompts us to think deeply.
- It is fragmented—a flood of unconnected programs.
- It can take up too much time (Talk 1).
- It can present a false view of life.
- It can present too much violence.
- It can influence us to buy things unwisely.
- It can be harmful to health.[1]

- *Eyes* — Don't sit close to the set.
  — Don't watch in a dark room; instead have a light on.
  — Don't wear sunglasses while watching.
  — Don't have glare on the screen from a window or light.
- *Ears* — Don't turn the sound above normal speech levels.
- *Breathing* — Don't tolerate a poorly ventilated room; nor a smoky one.
- *Posture* — Don't slump, with badly curved spine and sagging head; sit comfortably erect, on a reasonably firm chair, perhaps with back supported by cushions, and both feet on the floor.
- *Nutrition* — Don't be a 'TV nibbler'—certainly, don't nibble rubbish.
- *Sleep* — Don't watch TV excessively—and don't lose sleep over it!

Too much of anything isn't good!
Good things in excess become harmful . . .
Food is good but too much makes us sick.
Exercise is good but too much makes us tired.
Light is necessary to seeing but too much hurts the eyes.
Sound is necessary to hearing but too much damages the ears.
Car travel is enjoyable but too much makes us weary.
Television is enjoyable but too much makes us dull and passive.
A wise old saying can guide us: '*Moderation in all things.*'
Suggest: 'Decide with your parents *how much TV is enough.*'
Here are several ideas used successfully by some families:

- No week-day morning TV—attention should be on school.
- One hour only of after-school TV, leaving time for more active things. (*cont.*)

[1] Make this health angle the subject of Probe 5.

- Regularly ask, 'Is there something better I can do than viewing?'
- After dinner, watch only programs selected by the family.
- Have a 'TV Rest Day' once a week—and plan activities for it.
- Limit week-end viewing by having plenty else to do.
- Meal times are for conversation, not viewing.
- Don't watch TV for more than two hours at a stretch.

The answer of course is—'Yes, and many do.' The point of a discussion is to have some children tell about their family routines, which will come as a surprise to those from undiscriminating homes. A plan could include any of the following:

- The family uses a TV guide to plan its week (or day).
- Some programs are chosen for viewing (and discussion) by the whole family.
- The tastes of each child are also considered, subject to parental veto.
- In the absence of good programs, the set stays off.
- No unplanned view-view-viewing! (Anyway, silent times too are valued.)
- Any of the points from Probe 6 may be included.

This question is deliberately ambiguous. See what the class makes of it. e.g.

— No, *not seriously*, because so many ads are just fun-motivated attention-getters.

— Yes, *seriously*, because ads are very well produced, technically excellent, full of drama.

— No, *not seriously*, because ads (especially in children's viewing time) are often high-powered, profit-motivated, careless of truth, health and decency.

You might like to divide what follows into two discussions, thus:

A. *'Can you answer these 8 questions about TV ads?'*

(1) Do all channels use ads ('commercials')?
(2) Why do most channels depend on ads for their existence?
(3) Why do firms need to advertise?
(4) What is the key aim of an ad?
(5) Why are TV ads brief and 'punchy'?
(6) What are the favoured times for ads?
(7) Can you give examples of ads aimed mainly at children?
(8) Why do we need to question ads?

B. *'What questions should a viewer ask about a TV ad?'*

- Is this ad aimed mainly at children?
- The crunch-point of the ad is—'Buy .....'?
- How is this ad trying to persuade me (by appealing to which needs, desires, fears)?
- Are the claims for the product true/half-true/false/etc.?
- Are there competing products I should compare with this one?
- Do I really need this product?

(TV ads are treated in much greater depth by Probe 30.)

Many opinions will be voiced here, including:

- Interesting—entertaining or informative (not dull or stale).
- Easy to follow (not confusing or too fast or too slow).
- Tells me things I don't know about the world.

- Presents a believable, realistic view of life and people.
- Presents healthy attitudes to right and wrong—doesn't show violence as the best way to solve problems.
- Makes me feel better after viewing than I felt before—doesn't implant fear and horror to trouble my dreams.
- Technically skilful (e.g. in terms of scripting, sets, acting, language, costuming, music, sound-effects, camera-work, graphics, direction).

See where class discussion takes this. Each child may attempt to write out such a test—adults would call it their list of 'criteria'. Here is a minimal formula:

First impressions of the program: . . .

On reflection: (a) Positive points . . .
(b) Negative points . . .

Sum up: My rating of the show . . .

'Now, don't look at the camera!' Twelve year olds, Brendan and Peter, videotape a Kindergarten band in preparation for a display of school activities at the end-of-term Parent-Teacher Evening.

10 More 'Readings' of TV: The Terminology

'What is meant by the term, ... ?'

This question is a simple way to start a class discussion which will deepen children's understanding of how to 'read' television.

The following 10 questions[1] can be asked of every age/grade level with assurance that the children will have ideas of their own and will be able to give instances from their viewing experiences. (A checklist of points is provided under each question to help the teacher feed in further ideas, questions or activities if opportunity arises.)

(Synonyms: program kind/form/genre/format/category.)

The whole output of television can be divided into a number of categories or program types. There are no agreed, standard terms for these types, and some types overlap, e.g. 'serial drama' can apply to 'soap opera', but 'soap opera' is only one of several forms of 'serial drama'. The class can be asked:

'How many program types can you name and describe?'

News
Current Affairs Commentary
Documentary
Weather Report
Sport
Quiz or Game Show
Concert
Variety Show
Hit Parade
One-off Drama
Serial Drama
Soap Opera
Crime Drama
Comedy Drama
Modern Film/Movie
Old Film/Movie
Cartoon
Children's Program
Space/Science Drama

Possible Extensions: Identify by means of a survey the class's favourite program types . . . Raise the controversial problem of individual *taste* in relation to the favourites . . . Ask this searching question: 'If TV can be "educational", which of the program types is (a) always (b) sometimes (c) never educational?'

Story-line is the sequence of main happenings in any narrative form, such as a TV drama or a short story.

- Can you recount the story-line of a recent drama?
- Was the flow of the story smooth, jerky, or confusing?
- Could you believe such events might happen in real life?
- Did it begin slowly or dramatically? (What does 'dramatic' mean here?)
- Where did the most exciting parts come?
- How, if at all, was this story-line similar to others you have seen?

Possible Extensions: Compare the story-line of a good TV drama or film with the class's story-writing efforts . . . Especially show the dullness of some children's 'breakfast to bed' story-lines, where everything done between morning and bedtime gets equal space and weight. Why not leave out as much detail as possible? Why not begin near the exciting parts? Or start at or near the end and go back ('flashback') to what is essential for explaining how the main event came to pass?

1 These need not follow the previous 10 introductory 'readings'; they might be interspersed through them, or treated over a relatively concentrated period, or as otherwise desired.

Adapt probes to your class's level.

The 'Harp of Erin' shanty, part of the setting built for a thirteen-episode drama series on the bushranger Ben Hall—an ABC-BBC production in association with 20th Century Fox. Producer Neil McCallum is showing guests over the location.

Setting is the *where* and *when* of a story or TV drama. It is best revealed incidentally as the drama unfolds. The term also means specific scene elements—such as either natural scenery or set 'props', or the dress of the characters.

- When did the events of a chosen show take place?
- Where did most of the action take place?
- Was the scenery natural or studio-built?
- Did the setting, including dress, suit the story?

Possible Extensions: Much of the setting of a TV drama is visual—compare this to the problem faced by a storywriter or novelist (perhaps the one currently being read aloud to the class) in establishing a setting for readers . . . How can a visual setting establish a mood or emotion without a word being spoken?

- Who are the *main* characters in a selected TV drama?
- Are there also some notable minor characters?
- Briefly describe qualities of each main character?
- Are these characters believable (like people in real life)?
- Do they have to deal with real life problems?
- Or are they 'stereotypes', dealing with artificial problems?
- Can we agree that 'The main characters are usually the most memorable element in a story or TV drama'?

Possible Extensions: Ask all pupils to

study and report on characters in self-chosen TV shows . . . Or select a 'hero' or 'heroine' and explain why they are claimed to be such . . . Or explore the widespread practice of 'stereotyping' in TV dramas (e.g. the tough cop, the beautiful young heroine).

This word has several meanings. Most relevant in the context of TV drama is: an underlying or controlling idea, or a central message, which the drama is determined to get across to viewers, e.g. in most police dramas, that crime doesn't pay.

- What is the underlying theme in a TV drama known to the class?
- Are there also one or more secondary themes?
- Is this theme a significant one?
- Does it have to be significant in all dramas?
- Is it irritatingly slight or trivial?

Possible Extensions: Ask everyone to think out the theme of one TV drama seen recently and to express it in a single written sentence. (Children often like to say, e.g. 'This show is about police fighting criminals and its theme is that crime doesn't pay', or 'It is a family comedy which includes a lot of conflict but its theme is that the family love one another enough to eventually overcome their conflicts'.) . . . Divide into groups and ask each group to devise collectively a short story-line which has for its theme 'pride goes before a fall' or 'greedy people run the risk of losing everything'.

'Credits' are the public acknowledgment of contributions to the making of a creative production. The best-known example is the list at the end of a film, of all the people who helped to make it. The professionals who contribute to TV productions can be numerous, as is shown by this list of well-known ones:

Scriptwriter	Set designers
Director	Camera operators
Producer	Sound engineers
Actors	Graphics artists
Make-up artists	Music arrangers

- What is the role of each?

Possible Extensions: The fact that many professionals are needed in the making of TV productions is sometimes contrasted with the authorship of a book by one person. But this isn't quite accurate. Books also need the collaboration of a number of professionals—which? [An editor, designer, illustrator, typesetter, printer, bookbinder.] . . . Watch the Credits of TV productions in the coming week and see if there are other roles that can be added to those listed above.

The scriptwriter thinks up the story and writes it as a script in special dialogue form, leaving a wide, blank column to the left for filling in by the producer, director and others, mainly with directions to the camera crews. Always in the scriptwriter's mind is the thought that as much of the story as possible must be left to the camera rather than be told in words—words are kept to a minimum! (All directions in the script are in capital letters; only the words spoken by the characters are in lower case.)

- TV drama needs a scriptwriter—why?

- The scriptwriter writes *directions* and *dialogue*—what is the meaning of these two terms?

Possible Extensions: Divide the class into groups, each to script a brief stage play, e.g. on the theme of *crime doesn't pay*, a scene about two children who decide to do some shoplifting . . . Then script the piece for TV . . . Later, enact both.

- *Format of a Stage Play Script*

Crime at the Chemist's

Two boys are looking into the window of a chemist's shop. It is late afternoon.
DON (glancing around suspiciously): Listen, how about we nick two pairs of sunglasses?
CARL (surprised): Hey, wait on—what happens if we get busted?

- *Format of a TV Script*

Crime at the Chemist's

TWO BOYS ARE LOOKING INTO THE WINDOW OF A CHEMIST'S SHOP. IT IS LATE AFTERNOON.
DON (GLANCING AROUND SUSPICIOUSLY): How about we nick two pairs of sunglasses?
CARL (SURPRISED): Hey, wait on—what happens if we get busted?

Or the characters' names may be set off as follows:

DON: (GLANCING AROUND SUSPICIOUSLY) How about we nick two pairs of sunglasses?
CARL: (SURPRISED) Hey, wait on—what happens if we get busted?

This is a general term covering the many operations of the camera crews on a TV set—often three crews. Ask, 'What terms have you heard in relation to the camera work on a TV set?' [They will know some of the following.]

Set: The floor and 'props' where a scene is filmed.

Control Gallery: The room from which the director controls the filming ('shooting') of a scene.

Monitors: TV screens used by the director in making decisions on which pictures will be transmitted.

Camera Shots:
- 'Close-up' (C.U.): head and chest, or anything smaller.
- 'Medium shot' (M.S.): whole body, or somewhat less.
- 'Long shot' (L.S.): takes in the whole set, or up to M.S.

Camera Movements:
- 'Pan': Sweep the camera across the scene.
- 'Track in/out': Move the camera forward/back.

Changing from Camera to Camera:
- 'Cut': Switch off, or switch from one camera to another.
- 'Crab': Move the camera sideways.
- 'Fade in/up': Slowly build up the picture (or sound).
- 'Fade out/down': Slowly dim the picture (or sound) till it disappears.

Possible Extensions: Ask children to cut out pictures from magazines or newspapers of examples of the three camera shots (C.U., M.S., L.S.).

In relation to TV technique, we have already discussed two vital aspects—scriptwriting and camera work. Technique is all the means by which an idea is 'constructed' by the many professionals (see 16. CREDITS) to make a program (see 11. PROGRAM TYPE).

- What is 'technique' in the making of a TV program?
- Which do you consider to be the main techniques?
- Think of the last TV show which impressed you—was it well scripted? well directed? well acted? well filmed?
- Can you think of shows in which the technique was poor?

These are difficult questions for the young, but not impossible. It is enough to draw the children's attention to major aspects.

Possible Extensions: Compare TV techniques with the children's technique(s) in writing, and those of adult writers, e.g. choosing a type or category of writing, adopting a point of view for telling it, ways to begin, ways to develop the story-line, ways to present exciting moments, ways to conclude . . . Ask if they experience their writing as 'visual', i.e. seen in the mind and then described in words ('photographed') on paper . . . Stress that in telling a story, whether on a page or on a screen, our aim is to be 'dramatic' (see 12. STORY-LINE). The writer Robert Frost says, 'Everything written is as good as it is dramatic.'

This is the viewer's expression of opinion about a program—and the more thoughtful, the better! To respond thoughtfully the viewer needs to 'deconstruct' the program, as suggested by the following questions.

- Did you like the program?
- Was it one of your favourite *program types*? (11. above)
- Was the *story-line* effective? (12. above)
- Was the *setting* appropriate, perhaps attention-getting? (13. above)
- Was the acting good, were the *characters* believable? (14. above)
- Was there an evident *theme*, perhaps a significant one? (15. above)
- Would you have awarded any main *credits*? (16. 17. 18. above)
- Was it technically good (19. above) but weak in story (12. above) or vice versa, or were both weak, or both commendable?

Possible Extensions: Try, as a class, to look at a TV program together; discuss responses, then each write a considered review. As the culmination of the ten episodes above, this activity could be made the occasion for deep consideration and thought-in-writing. Much sharing of the writing (polished) should be arranged so that everyone experiences a richness of diverse, thoughtful opinions.

10 Closer 'Readings' of TV

There is scope in each of these 10 'Readings' for many lessons:

- Adapt them to the levels of your pupils.
- Change the order in any way you wish.
- Omit some, if the conceptual level seems too high.

N.B.

Follow a 'learning by doing' approach:

First, though, realise that plenty of 'doing' has already taken place—these pupils have had thousands of hours of TV experience. Primarily the teacher draws on this rather than feels obliged to present new TV experiences.

Second, remember that the best experience isn't what has happened *to* us, but what we DO with what has happened to us. So the teacher's role is to:

1. Set up questions/problems about the children's experiences.
2. Negotiate tasks/inquiries/investigations with them.
3. Encourage individual, reasoned points of view however variant, and a tolerant sharing of these.
4. Foster good self-expression and communication through talking, writing, constructing, and other forms.

'This time through, I want you to take particular notice of the camera work—how the good director is continually changing the angles to show us as much as possible of the most interesting action.'

Historical Introduction

► Ask children to research the beginnings of television. Every encyclopedia provides information, and the school library is likely to offer more specific sources.

The basic principle of converting light into an electrical form suitable for transmission was discovered in 1873 by an English telegrapher, May. (In telegraphy, signals travel along wires, while in radio and television they are transmitted through space as modulations of carrier waves of electromagnetic radiation.)

Fifty years passed before the principle was used in the first, crude television system: in 1923, by a Scotsman, J. L. Baird, and an American, C. F. Jenkins. Two years later they successfully demonstrated transmission of moving pictures in black-and-white, this being generally regarded as the beginning of a working television technology.

Not till 1936 was a first public TV service introduced—by the British Broadcasting Commission (BBC). In 1941 American television began, but it did not become widespread until the late forties, about the same time as European television.

In Australia, a first program was screened in Sydney on 16 September 1956. There weren't many sets in homes in that year, but people massed outside the windows of electrical retail shops to observe the new marvel. In the following year huge sales were recorded.

By 1981, twenty-five years after its introduction in Australia, over 90 percent of homes had one or more TV sets. They were being turned on for an average of 32 hours (colour) and 26 hours (black-and-white) each week.

Show the class these headlines from America's leading newspaper, *The New York Times*, 8 April 1927:

FAR-OFF SPEAKERS SEEN AS WELL AS HEARD HERE IN A TEST OF TELEVISION

LIKE A PHOTO COME TO LIFE

Hoover's Face Plainly Imaged as He Speaks in Washington.

THE FIRST TIME IN HISTORY

Pictures Are Flashed by Wire and Radio Synchronizing with Speaker's Voice

COMMERCIAL USE IN DOUBT

Discuss each of the headlines in detail; they capture the newness and wonder of the breakthrough. What is the central point of the excitement? [That a present-time event could at last be communicated in moving pictures, together with sound, across long distances.] What might people in the 1920s have thought about the future of this medium?

Possible Extensions: Ask pupils to research the history of pre-TV communication—especially of speech, writing, radio—emphasising the primacy of language in communication up to the arrival of television. Also, invite an elderly person to talk to the class about 'radio times', e.g. in the 1920s and 1930s, if possible, as well as radio in the 1940s and 1950s. Or grandparents might send along a written comment on what radio meant to them.

WARNING The main aim of a study of television in primary and secondary schools is to help children become thoughtful, sensibly critical viewers—NOT to make TV technicians of them!

Just as most will become good drivers without fathoming the internal combustion engine, so their 'media studies' should help them become, not technical experts, but good 'drivers' of TV, fully aware of the power of this medium, aware of the good and the bad it is capable of, and above all aware of the need for its responsible use.

To steer children into concentration on 'teletechnicalities' is to send them into a blind alley where they will adulate technical marvels instead of learning that the technology is only a vehicle for what is really important, namely the medium's 'messages' or content. A disposition to run a lesson on technicalities should first be questioned: 'Is this the best stimulus I can find for arousing critical interest in TV's messages?' An example of a positive answer: 'By making a program, children will gain a behind-the-scenes insight into TV's capacity to create illusion rather than reality'. Right! Proceed.

Probing the Nature of Television

Relevant here are two earlier discussions (3. *'What's good about TV?'* and 4. *'What's not good about TV?'*), but now the teacher can lead the class into thinking, discussing and investigating at whatever deeper levels the class and individual pupils are ready for.

(a) TV Is a Technology

No need to go deeply into this.

► Ask a group of technically inclined volunteers to research in the library, and report broadly to the class, concerning the technical process of filming and sound-recording an event, the transmitting from the TV station, and the reception by home sets.

(b) TV is Chiefly a Visual Medium

TV is immensely appealing for its pictures beamed into the home, especially when they convey plenty of action and drama. Most people feel that pictures carry more reality than other forms of communication. Research shows, for instance, that more people are willing to believe their TV news program than to believe news heard on radio or read in newspapers. ('. . . *people watch television.* They do not read it. Nor do they much listen to it. They watch it . . . And what they watch are dynamic, constantly changing images, as many as 1,200 different ones every hour.'—Neil Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood*, pub. W. H. Allen, 1983)

► Ask, 'Which are you more inclined to believe: things you see on TV, or hear on radio, or read in newspapers and books?' . . . Why? . . . But can't the picturing of an event *from a particular angle* be misleading? Can't the omission of some events, because they aren't dramatic enough for TV, give a distorted view of total reality?

(c) TV Plays Down Language

TV, it is true, uses sound as well as pictures. From the first it took over and incorporated radio technology into itself, but it made sound secondary to its dominant, picture function. Language was incidentally downgraded. The TV producer relies as much as possible on 'letting the pictures tell the story'—which means *always trying to keep language to a minimum.*

► Ask, 'What effect will TV's picture-emphasis have on people who would otherwise be reading a lot of books

and newspapers?' [Their reading ability will get rusty; they will miss ideas that would have come from reading; and their writing too is likely to suffer. The moral is that the individual must balance TV viewing with plenty of reading and writing.] Compare a viewer's choice of a handful of channels with a reader's choice of thousands of books—the reader has an enormous advantage!

(d) **TV Tells Only Some of the Truth**

All 'news' reporting is suspect because it prefers the dramatic or sensational to the greater part of reality, which is neither dramatic nor sensational. TV is even more suspect than newspaper or radio reporting, not only because it plays down language, but because it greatly prefers news which is in action pictures. Lacking such pictures it must revert to the 'talking head' of an announcer—which, however, is said to be 'not good television' and is kept to brief appearances between runs of action pictures. So TV news is more selective than press or radio news, and this means a partial (distorted?) presentation of the truth. This can easily be made clear to children . . .

- Ask the children to consider the 'whole reality' of the school . . . Which events around the school would make 'good television'—only playground fights, accidents, a break-in? . . . How many worthwhile activities of the school would not get a showing? . . . Might even events suitable as news for press or radio not 'make' TV?

(e) TV Is Overwhelmingly an Entertainment Medium

Though its potential is wider, TV is in practice overwhelmingly a medium of entertainment—NOT of the best in culture, knowledge or education, but of mass entertainment. Most of its programs consist of drama, variety, games and sport; even its 'more serious' side (news, comment, and documentary) strives for a mass appeal, an audience seeking to be entertained.

► Is TV only an entertainment medium? Do any 'serious programs' have a following? Should there be a balance of information and entertainment? Should there be more educational TV? (What, when, how?) Why shouldn't other media handle the 'serious stuff'?

(f) TV Is Mostly Strongly Commercial

Basic to the commercial TV channels, which more than 80% of viewers follow most of the time, is the need to make a profit for shareholders. These channels depend on advertising for their income. Only if they succeed in attracting large numbers of viewers will advertisers use them. So they choose programs with an eye to delivering big audiences to the advertisers.

► What considerations would be likely to guide the commercial TV channels in deciding which programs to screen? Would the ABC have different considerations? What are 'the ratings' and why are they important?

(g) TV is Extremely Easy to Follow

TV is cheap, instantly available, and effortlessly easy to follow. It requires no learned skills and is therefore much simpler than reading. Its beguiling simplicity has been seen by some of its critics as the source of negative influences: it is said to encourage passivity and uncritical receptivity, a temptation to view-view-view at the expense of many worthy and more active pursuits.

► Does TV make us lazy? Does it entertain so much that our appreciation of entertainment declines? What *good* things that you do, or feel you ought to do, go undone or get restricted because of TV? (Refer to Probe 1.)

Australians just love TV!

Over 96% of all families have at least one receiver and they switch it on for an average of 30 hours a week.

Children are probably even keener viewers than their parents, yet only a small part of the total TV output is identifiable as 'children's television'.

► Ask the class to identify distinctive 'children's television' in the current week's TV Guide, and roughly calculate the small percentage of this in relation to all the television screened during the week between 6.00 a.m. and midnight.

Nearly all children therefore watch a great deal of 'adult television'!

Does this matter? Many adults think it does. Whenever they are asked, they say there should be more children's TV. The commercial channels don't provide much, if only because advertisers' money is attracted mainly to shows watched by adults, they being the consumers, the spenders whom the advertisers want to reach. The ABC provides more, but its budget in this area is far from generous, and it imports many shows because to do so is cheaper than producing in Australia for Australian needs.

What do Children Want from TV?

► What TV do children want? This is always an interesting question when raised in class. A survey, following plenty of discussion (which is vital to articulating preferences), helps them

grasp many aspects of program type and content.

A number of research findings are available; for instance, *TV: The Child's View*, by Patricia Palmer and Henry Mayer (Sydney University, 1983). This study observes some differences of taste according to AGE; for example, a shift from interest at 8 years old in slapstick, cartoons and funny body antics to seeking more realism at 11-12. And even more marked differences according to SEX; for example, most boys like goodies and baddies and, increasingly, sport; while most girls like singing, dancing and, increasingly, the old movies that show 'what life was like'. The differences of taste according to sex are in fact more marked by age 11-12 than are taste differences *in general* between 8 year olds and 11-12 year olds. However, there is broadly shared enjoyment of 'comedy, drama and action' by all children in both age groups.

► The children can be asked to identify 'Things I especially like within TV programs', e.g. 'action', 'fast cars', 'singing'. Collect and list these preferences. Suggest that such dramatic elements might find their way into what the children write.

Do Children Prefer Adult TV?

The odds against more and better TV for children are heavy: *money* for children's TV has always been in short supply, whether from advertisers or governments; *time* for it is limited, mainly to the short period after school—until the adults arrive home from work and take over the set. Moreoever, programming to suit all children is difficult, for 'children' is a term that covers the wide variety of tastes that lie between age 3 and age 18.

The chances of 'good TV for children' might be helped if a well-funded Children's TV Station were established . . .

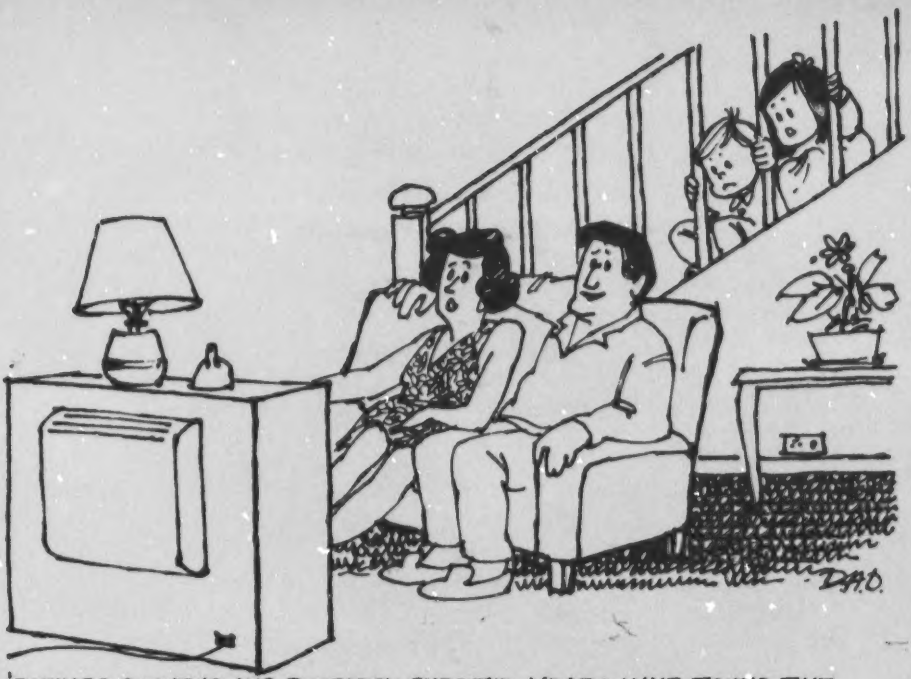
► Ask your class what they think of that idea . . . What times of day would it operate? . . . What would they program into those times? . . . Would they consider the tastes of children younger and older than themselves?

An intriguing problem is raised by a man who has spent most of his working life trying to raise the quality of children's television, Ian Fairweather, well known through *Here's Humphrey* and *Curiosity Show*. He says:

> 'Ratings surveys and research over the years have found that on the whole children prefer watching programs made for adults. Why? I think that adult programs with their higher budgets are more entertaining, exciting, fast-moving and dare I say it, made for an intellectual and social development age closer to that of the child than the adult. It's the television world of the adult programs with their materialism, avarice, greed, sex, age and physical appearance stereotypes (all of these being anti-social) which I believe we have to counter with Children's Television.' (*Television—A New Look for Viewers*, pub. MediaCom Associates, Adelaide, 1982, p. 27.)

Even if children were attracted to programs improved as he suggests, they would, it seems certain, also continue to seek out adult programs. (How many parents would effectively supervise their children's viewing of such programs?)

Fairweather's 'dare' is also intriguing. Can it be true that many adult programs are in fact being made at the mental-age level of children? An eminent professor of communications at New York University, Neil Postman, is in no doubt that this *is* happening. As proof he cites the 1980 *Neilson Report on Television* which shows that adults (over 18 years) rated as their 'most favoured' programs seven out of fifteen programs which were also most favoured not only by 12-17 year olds but also by 2-11 year olds! (*Family Feud, The Muppet Show, Hee Haw, M.A.S.H., Dance Fever, Happy Days Again, Sha Na Na.*) Does this signify, he



'RATINGS SURVEYS AND RESEARCH OVER THE YEARS HAVE FOUND THAT, ON THE WHOLE, CHILDREN PREFER WATCHING PROGRAMS MADE FOR ADULTS.'

Ian Fairweather, *Television—A New Look for Viewers* (1982)

asks, the cultivation by television of 'adultified' children or 'childified' adults?

TV as 'Total Disclosure Medium'

Postman's views are contained in his powerful book, *The Disappearance of Childhood*, pub. W. H. Allen, 1983, which argues that television is a 'total disclosure medium'. He means that its pictures, beamed into the home, present children of every age with an unrestrained view of adult society—disclosure of its intimate social and sexual relations, its greed and violence, its violent language, its consumer excesses, and the rest. Moreover, television, through its craving for dramatic visual effects, presents this view of adult society in an exaggerated form. So the common claim that TV has made this younger generation better informed than any previous generation is facile, if not dangerous. The informing is selective, biased, misleading. It has produced in the young a widespread cynicism of the most negative kind—and childhood's precious curiosity is suffering.

Another communications professor, Joshua Meyrowitz of the University of New Hampshire, agrees: 'Distinctions that were clear 30 years ago are now blurred . . . The change in children is like a social earthquake that has shaken many old assumptions and disrupted many institutions.' (*Christian Science Monitor*, 28/2/1983.)

Postman's brilliant book deserves to be read by every teacher who wishes to understand the nature of the ultra-modern world we inhabit. *'What can we do about the disappearance of childhood?'* he asks, and confesses to 'dejection' at not having a pat answer. He declares, however, that the school is 'the only public institution left to us based on the assumption that there are important differences between childhood and adulthood and that adults have things of value to teach children' (p. 151).

The 'Television Curriculum' Which Is at Odds with the School Curriculum

Neil Postman, author of *'The Disappearance of Childhood'*, argues that television is in fact a powerful curriculum which is 'antagonistic to what the school wishes to teach' . . .

- *Television is a curriculum:* 'a specially constructed information system whose purpose is to influence, teach, train, or cultivate the mind and character of the young . . . it competes successfully with the school curriculum. In fact, it damn near obliterates it.'

The Five Characteristics of the TV Curriculum

1. It puts pictures before language. Basically TV is a stream of visual images, with language in a decidedly secondary position. Thus it weakens children's ability to think in words, conceptually—the literate thinking the schools promote.

2. It elevates pictures and stories above analysis and argument. In pouring out pictures and stories, it allows for no questions, or discussion, or argument; it cultivates passivity, a reluctance to think in analytical, sequential, reasoning forms such as the schools promote.

3. It is entirely easy. It needs no skill, develops no skill, imposes no effort, yields no intellectual or emotional growth. It is as instantly available to a young child as to an adult. This prompts the young to resent the disciplined learning which the schools promote.

4. It is nearly always entertaining. It considers to be relatively unsuitable whatever is not entertaining. Its overriding purpose is not skills or knowledge but excitement, fun and fantasy—which further prompts the young to resent the schools' promotion of disciplined learning.

5. It is fragmented, discontinuous. Having entertainment as its purpose, TV presents programs which are unconnected to one another—an overall incoherence—in contrast to the rational order promoted by the school curriculum.

Postman sums up with a warning: 'the TV curriculum is quite probably dangerous'.

To counter the danger he proposes a school curriculum in which 'all subjects are presented as a stage in the historical development of humanity; in which the philosophy of science, of history, of language, and of religion are taught; and in which there is a strong emphasis on classical forms of artistic expression.' (See his article, 'Engaging Students in the Great Conversation', in *Phi Delta Kappan*, January 1983.)

Possible Activities

- Survey pupils for relevant viewing habits and preferences.
- Raise questions which require them to articulate opinions.
- Send them to do certain viewing and specific observing.
- Or run a video in class for that purpose (check copyright).
- Stimulate a free exchange of opinions, whether in pairs, small groups, larger groups, or the whole class.
- Encourage the jotting and circulating of written opinions.
- Require more extended and careful writing.
- Launch major research ventures, by individuals or groups.
- Arrange reporting back on research, and have it discussed.
- Use any technical activity provided it will help to raise children's conscious awareness of how TV can serve desirable purposes (activities such as script-writing, scene setting, acting, and camera work)

Here let us help the class to confront with questions television's main purpose —entertainment. Remember that nearly all children have had very extensive experience of TV—but of an uncritical kind! (N.B. 'Criticism' does not mean disapproving; it means passing judgment so that both positive and negative features are fairly considered.)

TV, it is often said, cultivates passivity in viewers. It allows for no talking back and little time between shows even for an exchange of comments between members of the family. How can young children be encouraged to become critical? Some parents help by talking with their children, but most children are not so fortunate and they need the school to fill the role of guide or 'trusted adult'.

The following Probe suggests questions that can be asked in relation to the main types of entertainment programs. (There is scope for many lessons.) Let us first, however, enlarge on a list of possible *activities* which the teacher might link with any lesson.

Cartoons

► Discuss TV cartoons and printed comics: the cartoon is an animated comic. The word 'comic' suggests *funny*. Do TV cartoons always have to be funny?

► Brainstorm the titles of cartoons known to the class: 'Bugs Bunny', 'Spiderman', 'Scooby Doo', etc. Give everyone three votes and see which shows are most popular.

► In groups make up a role play about a favourite cartoon character; rehearse, then perform to the class.

► Let's observe cartoons in the coming week and then be ready to answer questions about them, e.g.

- Does every cartoon have a well-known hero *and* villain?
- What about heroines and female villains?
- Is the hero (or heroine) usually a very strong character?
- What other qualities do cartoon heroes (or heroines) have?
- How much violence? More than in other programs?
- (*Sum up.*) Why are cartoons so popular? Do some cartoons get boring?

► How are cartoons made? (Ask a group for a research report on this.) Develop some cartoon creations, e.g. cut pictures from magazines, sequence them, and write captions or speech bubbles. Or draw a comic sequence.

Drama

► 'Drama' is a term that covers more than half of all television programs. Ask the class to brainstorm the many types of drama. As pointed out in Probe 11, there are no agreed names for these types. The list could include categories as variously named as:

cartoons
puppet shows
family serials
comedies
soap operas
serious plays
historical plays
Shakespeare
musicals
adventure dramas
war dramas
horror shows
police/crime series
space fantasy
science fiction
old movies
modern films

► Ask for volunteers (individuals, partners, groups) who will write a 'Why I Like . . .' statement about one of the types of drama. Some can be read to the class and discussed.

► Develop further, as pupils identify a drama type and show special interest in it, by securing an investigation of the reasons for its appeal. Types likely to be favoured will include: family serials, science or space fiction, horror shows, war dramas, police series.

► What is a 'soap opera'? Most pupils will have heard this term used. Ask them to find what it means.

The Macquarie Dictionary: '**soap opera** . . . a radio or television play presented serially in short regular programs, dealing usually with domestic problems, esp. in a highly emotional manner. [so called because originally sponsored on U.S. radio networks by soap manufacturers]'

Today the term is used even more broadly: for any serial drama built around a continuing group of characters. But note that such *serials*, e.g. 'Sons and Daughters', are different from *series* drama, such as 'Cop Shop', where each episode is complete in itself.

Recently a critic said that most soap operas suffer from these qualities:
little humour
extremely slow progress of the story
much talking
not much good acting (the budget allows little rehearsal).
Yet the 'soaps' are often very popular. Could it be because viewers identify with the personal problems of the characters?

► Collect pictures of TV 'stars' for a classroom display. Discuss why they are so popular? How do they typically behave on their programs? Would their real life personalities be similar to that of their TV 'image'?

► Older children can be challenged by critical questions about the currently popular 'soaps', e.g.

- What are the good and bad qualities of the characters?
- Is this a real ('believable') family?
- Do we really know much about their lives?
- Are their problems similar to ordinary families' problems?
- What do they see as the important things in life?

► Obtain one or more short TV dramas and arrange screening, then proceed to develop a thoughtful *criticism*. (The points considered in Probes 9, 10 and 20 can now be developed through discussion.)

► One possible approach to criticism of a TV drama:

- Discuss 'first impressions', then consider them deeply.
- An interesting *story-line*? Or is it rather obvious?

In the ABC's seven-episode drama series, 'Mother and Son', mother Maggie (Ruth Cracknell) prepares breakfast for son Arthur (Garry McDonald). An ABC publicity handout categorises this as a 'situation comedy series'.

- Attention-getting *setting* (place, time, props, dress)? Or dull?
- Believable *characters*, well acted? Or unlikely ones?
- *Realistic*—it could happen somewhere? Or unrealistic?
- A worthwhile *theme*, and values? Or unworthy, trivial?
- An element of *originality* (fresh, imaginative)? Or predictable?
- Technically good? Or not? [see Probe 19]

► *Stereotypes.* Building on references to these in Probe 14, help older pupils to make a study of them. (What is a stereotype in TV drama? It is a character who acts out a role, not as a normally complex person, but according to a very narrow range of behaviours commonly expected of that role. Santa Claus, for instance, is expected to be not only old, white-bearded and plump but also jolly, child-adoring, unshakably intent on pleasing—and nothing else.)

Ask the class to think of some TV stereotypes—the fussy mother, stern father, tough cop, aggressive gangster, fast-talking salesman, and so on. Then, over the period of a week, ask individuals or groups each to take responsibility for noting and reporting the typical behaviour of one of the following common stereotypes:

mothers	models
fathers	pop stars
detectives	businessmen
gangsters	space heroes
doctors	teenagers
clergymen	rich people
teachers	poor people

non-English speaking persons

Could TV stereotypes influence the behaviour of viewers?

Other Entertainment Areas

Apart from Drama and Cartoons, there

are several areas of television entertainment programs that pupils can profitably explore; in particular—

- *Sport:* How does TV handle it (on the whole very successfully)?
- *Quizzes and Games:* What makes for a popular program formula?
- *Variety Shows:* What are commonly the elements of the variety?
- *Pop Concerts:* What music and what 'gimmicks' attract audiences?

Who Likes Violence?

People love violence—on TV. But not in real life. To watch three murders, five bashings and a Middle East massacre in a single evening is one thing—who cares?—but to find that a 'lout' has let down your tyres, jammed the public phone you need urgently, or stolen your new video—that's downright shocking and what's society coming to!

Many people watch TV violence avidly and yet, when questioned, they'll declare, 'There should be legal limits on TV violence!' (See the *National Times* report, 7/2/1972.) Why? Because, they'll say, too much viewing of violence can't but increase the violence in society.

- ► As a preliminary, ask children to discuss which programs often include acts of violence.
- ► Ask older children, 'Do you think it matters if kindergarten children watch TV violence day after day?'

What Is Violence?

- ► Discuss the forms taken by violence on television. Attempt to list them. (It can take an extraordinary number of

forms!) Let them discover that it isn't limited to westerns, wars and crime shows but extends to cartoons, ads, and the news.

► Ask older children, after discussion, to attempt a written definition of violence [e.g. 'Violence is an act of physical force or a threat of physical force against someone you disagree with or wish to compel to do something.']

► Do some acts of violence on TV worry you, but not others? How do you distinguish? [e.g. A difference between the factual (news) and the fictional (cartoons, etc.)?]

How Much Violence Comes Over TV?

Media authority Kevin Tindall says: 'The average Australian child sees in excess of 5 acts of television violence per hour'. (In *Television—A New Look for Viewers*, pub. MediaCom Associates, Adelaide, 1982, p. 36.)

► Using Tindall's figure, ask children to calculate how many hours of TV they watch in an average week, multiply this by 5, and then multiply the week's total by 52 to arrive at the number of acts of violence absorbed in a year. Then work out how many in the years between, say, age 3 and age 18.

► Investigate the quantity and nature of TV violence. Negotiate responsibility among pupils for itemising the number and kinds of violence screened between 4.00 and 8.30 on a selected evening (or week). In preparation for this, draw the class into the laying-out of a survey form which includes: Name of Program, and Act of Violence (columns for: abusive words; threats; blows; shootings, chases; other). Older children might also add: Victims (men; women; children; animals; even members of minority groups); and Perpetrators (men, women, children, minority group members).

► Is TV violence usually untrue to life? All those mighty blows received by the hero, who just shakes himself and slams successfully back! Whereas in real life, even to be relatively gently thumped once . . .

Common Objections to TV Violence

1. *It blunts the viewer's sensitivity.* Seeing so much violence, the child becomes coarsened to what should be humanly felt as shock, horror, tragedy.

2. *It implants subconscious anxiety.* Heavy viewers are more fearful, mistrustful, and anxious than light viewers, according to U.S. researcher G. Gerbner (cited by Tindall).

3. *It teaches a wrong way to solve problems.* Instead of thoughtfulness, reasoning and discussion, violence suggests that instant force is the best way to solve a problem. Not only 'baddies' do so, but more subtly TV often puts the effective violence into the fists and guns of 'goodies'.

4. *It undermines belief in adult reasonableness.* Children so often see adults doing crazy things (in 'news' as well as in dramas) that their faith in an orderly future is shattered—they can't be expected to know that TV is often biased towards sensation-seeking and 'opening the backstage of adult life' (Meyrowitz) while neglecting to show the decent but duller frontstage.

► Do you think TV violence has *any* effect on you? Have you heard of people, including younger children, who are upset by it? Have you ever gone to bed feeling afraid after a horror show? Have you ever had bad dreams caused by viewing?

► Set up problem or conflict situations (and perhaps role-play them) which might be 'solved' by violence, then proceed to find non-violent solutions. Ask the class to suggest the situations, e.g. a quarrel; an unjust accusation; a difference of opinion about sport, music or television; or a conflict between national groups.

The Strongest Argument against TV Violence

Some people, including some researchers, say that violence on TV doesn't matter; unlike violence in real life, it is 'distanced' from the viewer by the medium. Against this is the compelling argument that TV does obviously influence people's behaviour because advertisers willingly spend their millions of dollars in confident assurance that they *will* secure a powerful effect.

► Ask the class, 'If advertisers spend millions knowing that they can influence viewers, isn't it certain that continual TV violence of every kind will influence viewers, either consciously or unconsciously, to use violence as a way of solving conflicts?'

Many Countries Restrict TV Violence

• *United Kingdom*, with about two acts of violence per hour compared to Australia's five, monitors TV violence much more carefully than we do.

• *Many European countries* have either outlawed TV violence or limited it to one act per hour.

• *Norway, Sweden, Denmark* have cut the violence almost to zero.

Several Major Reports Urge Restriction

• *United States:* Surgeon General's Report, 1972: 'There is a relationship between violence on television and the behaviour of viewers, but nobody can be certain just what it is' [and it goes on to urge action by the TV industry, government, and citizens to limit the violence].

• *Canada:* Royal Commission on Violence, 1977: 'We believe that, while increased exploitation and depiction of violence in the media is only one of the many social factors contributing to crime, it is the largest single factor most amenable to rectification.'

• *United Kingdom:* Annan Committee Report, 1977: 'Violence on the screen arouses in certain individuals passions which in certain circumstances do harm. The available research therefore suggests that, although television has far less influence than direct experience, it can have an impact in matters where people's attitudes and values are yet unformed. How strong this influence is varies with the issue and the individual . . . The broadcasting authorities should monitor the amount of violence . . .'

Why Is TV Violence Hard to Check in Australia?

Australia too has had similar reports. For example, the 1978 Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts recommended that: 'periodic assessments be made of the amount and kind of violence . . . and this information be taken into account by the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal when assessing a station's performance during licence renewal and hearings.'

Kevin Tindall (*op. cit.*) says that with the exception of Australia, Canada, Japan and U.S.A., most countries he has visited have 'firm policies concerning television violence'. What is holding Australia back? There is money to be made from continual portrayal of violence.

He says, 'Violence is probably the most certain and best developed technique for attracting viewers. It is easier to boost a program by inserting a car chase, a fight or gun play than to write an original and compelling story line . . .'

Since TV in Australia, except for its ABC segment, is in the hands of just four powerful business groups whose basic interest is their profitability (see Probe 29), there will not be a determined bid from within the TV industry to limit TV violence. So Tindall declares:

> 'It is well and truly time that we all started to demand of our government and TV industry a more responsible response to all the information available about television violence. It is not enough to say that viewers

can turn their TV sets off. Australian viewers have the right to go one step further and determine the extent and nature of violence depicted on television.'

► Older children will be interested to hear from their teacher some of the facts above about restrictions on TV violence. (It is also information that might be conveyed to parents.)

This is an inquiry, not into 'good news', but into how good our television news services are. Almost every family watches the evening television news, so children already have ideas on the subject.

► 'What news should a (responsible) TV channel bring to us each evening?' Discussion is likely to arrive at the view that there should be a balance of the important events taking place internationally and in Australia.

► 'What is good news reporting?' Discussion might decide: a lively and fairly full picture of an event, some explanation of its background, and a range of opinions as to what caused it and what its effects could be.

There Is Always Too Much News

► 'In a big world and a big country like Australia, how many newsworthy events are taking place daily?'

This is an important question for children to ponder and discuss. All the Social Studies knowledge they can muster has a place here. A map of the world and a map of Australia can be scrutinised. How many people on these continents? All doing things, making news? Which are the 'super powers'? And so on.

A conclusion soon emerges: the total of news every day is enormous! Even the part of the total that pours daily into each TV newsroom is huge—thousands of words and heaps of film and video.

So what must the TV news programmers do? They *must* reject most of it. Of course. But the vital question for all of us is: *How do the TV programmers finally SELECT the small part of the daily news that appears on the screen?*

► As a preliminary to exploring this question, ask: 'How long are the main evening news sessions?' 'Would their length change if there were more news or very important news on a particular day?' 'If not, would the time given to ads be reduced to allow for more news reporting?' . . .

Which Factors Influence the Selection of TV News?

Three powerful considerations[1] dominate the minds of TV journalists and editors:

1. Be Entertaining!

Because TV is mainly regarded as a medium of entertainment, even the news is expected to entertain first and inform second. The channels compete to secure the highest ratings through an entertaining form of presentation more than by the quality, quantity and range of the information. The TV journalist is always considering, Is this item—

- dramatic? (personalities, action, conflict, violence, menace . . .)
- humorous? (human foibles, ockerism, wit, animal antics . . .)
- sport? (stars, major competitions, international finals . . .)
- known to most? (the most widely known politicians, celebrities . . .)
- visual? (see 2.)

2. Be Visual!

This is the distinctive feature of television, its huge advantage over radio and the press. 'Good television' is generally regarded by program managers as a stream of dramatic action pictures, interspersed with as few words as possible. Offer, by all means, a news 'presenter' who is handsome or beautiful and who speaks with enthusiasm and 'sincerity' but keep this 'talking head' to as few appearances and words as possible: let the pictures carry the story!

3. Be Brief!

Be brief not just because the available time is short nor because so much news is clamouring for inclusion but also because the viewers mostly want to be entertained rather than informed. So, even top news items seldom run longer than 90 seconds (200-250 words), interviews seldom longer than 30 seconds. The 'news' on TV is boiled down to a brief summary, often little more than a headlining of events—oversimplified news, with preference given to personalities briefly glimpsed rather than to issues deeply probed.

A Range of Activities

► *'What is news?'* [From discussion, discover that the term 'news' is relative to each medium: very local news, for example, is nearly all oral, and only a little 'makes it' into the local newspaper or local radio station, while only the rarest item gets into a major newspaper or onto a TV screen. Refer to Probe 22 (d) for the few happenings around a school that might interest a TV journalist.]

► *How much actual news time?* Ask all pupils to attend to their family's TV news program tonight with a watch, pen and paper to hand. From the 30 (or 60) minutes programmed, deduct the time devoted to weather, sport, and advertisements, leaving . . . . . minutes of news. Only 15 minutes?

► Allowing about 150 words per minute of actual TV news, calculate how many words were used. Then compare this total with the words in the news sections of a daily newspaper. What conclusion can be drawn about

[1] Some writers would add a fourth consideration: *Be Inoffensive to Sponsors.* For example, don't feature news which runs counter to the channel's advertisers; nor left-wing political views offensive to conservative business interests.

the different quantity of news information coming from TV and newspapers?

- Compare the quantity of news information in a half-hour of the ABC or Channel 0 with that of a commercial channel.
- Ask pupils to compare treatment of a TV news item with its treatment in an evening and/or morning newspaper—and report the differences to the class.
- In addition to its evening TV news time, the ABC has two news comment sessions, *Nationwide* (every week night) and *Four Corners* (Saturday night). Do the commercial channels have similar sessions? Compare the manner of presentation of the ABC's sessions with any commercial sessions.
- News is always reported from *a point of view*. This can 'colour', 'slant' or 'bias' the news. Many points-of-view are possible! Demonstrate this by having two pupils unexpectedly enact a dispute in class; it need take only 30-60 seconds, e.g. an accusation of name-calling by one and an indignant denial by another—a 'spontaneous' outburst. The teacher lets it run, then asks everyone to write an eyewitness account. Compare the results, showing up the differences . . . Might not TV news, even with the best of intentions, similarly present only a limited point-of-view on an event—or, worse, a 'coloured', 'slanted', or 'biased' point of view.
- *Some common points-of-view:* Make up a short role-play, e.g. A fire in the

Three forms of ABC-TV news and commentary: Richard Morecroft (top) is a news reader; Geraldine Doogue compères the current affairs program, 'Nationwide'; Huw Evans moved, early in 1984, from the compering of radio current affairs to a new role as TV interviewer.

'And what do you think about Australian men now you've met a number of them?' Matthew parodies the TV interviewer in questioning 'pop stars' Alison and Julia.

tuckshop just before school begins is noticed by two children who swiftly inform a teacher so that s/he is able to use a fire-extinguisher just in time; groups can write the story for TV news (a) as presented in words only by a news reader, (b) as told in interview during the event by one of the children, (c) as told on the spot after the event by a TV journalist.

► *Does the news present the real world?* When the class has realised that TV news favours what is entertaining and dramatic, ask for some thoughts about 'real life' and the 'real world'. There is no limit to where such an inquiry (an aspect of Social Studies?) might be taken. Ask older children, 'Might a Kindergarten child think that the wider world shown by TV is an accurate view of the real world? How misleading could this be?'

► *Explore distortions of the news.* After a class discussion, set up a situation which will be distorted in some way by everyone, e.g. SITUATION: Teacher has to leave the class for 20 minutes, so requires silent reading, and on returning asks if it was carried out (in fact, little reading was done). Distortions in reporting might include:

Falsehood: an enthusiastic account of keen, quiet reading;

Evasion: an altogether different matter is raised with the teacher;

Focus on a minor detail: the heat made concentration difficult;

Focus on a scapegoat: Humphrey as usual was distracting us;

Understatement: we perhaps might have done more reading;

Half-truth: we were all busy, no one was idle;

Muddy the issue: talk-talk-talk but never quite answer the question.

Relate these and other distortions to TV news, but show that they might also be found in newspaper and radio news—and, of course, in real life!

► *Explore interviewing.* Set up interviews on subjects relevant to the pupils' lives; and exchange the roles of interviewer and interviewee. After some experience, collate ideas on 'What is good interviewing?' (Excellent but simple practice can come from each pupil bringing a personal object to school, e.g. a book, calculator, heirloom, shell, or trophy, and without saying a word about it, oblige a group or the whole class to ask specific questions which draw specific answers and explanations until the significance of the object to the interviewee becomes clear to all.)

► *What is special about TV interviewing?* Time is the tyrant. Everything has to be hurried without seeming to be. The interviewer pushes hard for brief answers. Interviewees often wish to make full explanations but they are continually impeded by rapid-fire questions. Meanwhile the camera is playing on the face or the fidgeting fingers to pick up 'body language' which tells the viewers about the feelings of the interviewee. Later the interview is edited firmly, or ruthlessly, and (surprise!) what gets onto the screen often disappoints the interviewee.

► *Explore documentary.* Ask, 'What is a documentary program on TV? How is it different from drama or the news?' When understanding develops sufficiently, ask for suggestions about a documentary that might be made of some aspect of school life. ('Playground games'? 'Activities in Kindergarten'? 'A day's work in the Year 5 classroom'? 'Every school is multicultural'?) By a combination of role-play and scripting, work out what will be presented to the camera and what will be said (what is said may be only the narrator's 'voice over', or this may be interspersed with comment from individuals who are pictured, or a reporter may also appear and interview someone). If possible, clinch the project by filming with Super 8 equipment or portable video, and involve the children in problems of film technique.

Two main points need to be kept in mind about language for TV: first, that it mostly takes second place to the pictures and so is kept to a minimum; second, that it is mostly not only heard but is seen to be spoken and so must sound like speech, not like writing-being-read.

Brief and Conversational

Two conditions are therefore imposed on the scriptwriter: keep the language brief and keep it conversational in tone—as if an amiable but by no means wordy person is chatting to the viewer in the living room.

The scripted language may be for news, comment on the news, narration of a documentary, the voice behind an ad, the voice in an educational program, or the voices in any kind of drama.

The Scriptwriter at Work

A format for a TV script is suggested in Probe 17. The left-hand column is for filling in by the production team, largely with directions for the cameras. All directions, in either column, are typed in capital letters; only the spoken words, in the right-hand column, are in lower case.

After experimenting with the writing of a very short script, as suggested in Probe 17, a more ambitious script might be attempted. Here are some further hints on the craft of the scriptwriter.

(a) **The Pictures Come First.** Acquire the imaginative habit of looking through the eyes of the viewer. The viewer wants to see attention-holding pictures. So the director thinks out each situation and camera shot in terms of what will best present action to the viewer.

(b) **The Language Is Brief and Conversational.** For the reasons already given, the skilled scriptwriter assigns as much as possible of the message or story to be told by the pictures, leaving as little as possible for the words.

(c) **Everyday Settings Are Advisable.** The place for historical drama or space fantasy is radio or literature! The settings are generally too expensive for TV. Lacking the million dollar budget of the movie-maker, the TV producer usually has to stay with here-and-now settings. Of course such settings must be chosen with an eye to visual interest for the viewer—any old setting won't do except perhaps for a story of loneliness or boredom.

(d) **Move Through Changes of Setting.** Several settings can be used to lend variety. There is no need to confine the action to one room or one outdoor place. But too many shifts can become confusing, fragmented. (For example, a shopping centre, a house and garden, a room in the house—these three basic settings can provide great scope without looking for others.)

(e) **Film Shots Can Increase Variety.** Within the framework of several settings, well-chosen film shots without accompanying words can add variety, link scenes, and enhance the atmosphere of the story. (For example, a sweeping shot of the approaches to the shopping centre, brief glimpses of insect and bird life in the garden, and focus on ornaments in the room.)

(f) **Only 2-4 Characters at Once.** The TV screen is small—very different from the big screens of theatres. So TV is said to be an intimate medium, good for the expressions on faces in close-ups. To fit many people onto this small screen is to picture small figurines in the distance and this makes continuing dialogue impossible.

(g) **Keep the Characters Distinct from One Another.** An opening shot of a family at the dinner table makes the characters and their relationships to one another clear at once, without need of a word of explanation. But good casting is needed to keep most other characters very distinct in appearance one from another, and words are often needed to clarify most relationships.

- ► Script items of news on real or imagined school events (i.e. fact-type reporting), and suggest possible accompanying camera shots.
- ► Script a documentary which reports some aspect of school or locality life. (See the last item in Probe 26.)
- ► Script an ad, including spoken pieces from a narrator or from a character who is part of the action.
- ► Script an educational program on current work which lends itself to camera exposition (e.g. local geography) and try to keep words to a minimum.
- ► Script any kind of drama, building on Probe 17 and taking into account what is said about drama in Probe 24.

The British authority on media, Len Masterman, says, 'The question of who owns and controls the mass media may be one of the few areas of media education where some *'telling'* may be necessary—where the teacher may feel s/he should provide students with a certain amount of factual information.' (*Metro*, Summer 1983)

That is, the teacher is perhaps justi-

fied here in turning from pupil-activity methods to the simple handing down of information. Even so, will the information mean anything to the children? The teacher must decide—whether to omit this area OR present part or all of it (to older children) OR ask children to investigate parts of the area.

Here is a brief view of the ownership picture, followed by some questions and activities the teacher may find helpful...

Australia's Two-layer System

Ownership of television in Australia is said to be 'two-layered': 72 of the nation's 120 stations are controlled by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, set up by the federal government; 48 are owned by a very small number of private companies. (Many of the ABC's stations transmit to the less populous parts of Australia.) The commercial stations receive their income from the sale of advertising time. The ABC is funded by the Australian Government, but there is general public expectation that the Government will respect the independence of the Corporation, whose managing body is a Board of (eight) Directors.

'Big 4' Ownership of the Commercial Stations

Ownership of nearly all the commercial stations is in the hands of four powerful, competing business groups, all of which have extensive investments in other media areas, notably newspapers, magazines and radio:

- **'Fairfax Group' (John Fairfax & Sons Ltd):** Has TV interests in ATN 7 (Sydney), BTQ 7 (Brisbane), NBN 3 (Newcastle), WIN 4 (Wollongong), and some other stations. Its newspaper interests include: *Sydney Morning Herald, Sun Herald, The Sun, National Times, Financial Review,*

The Channel 7 news helicopter enables TV journalists to reach the scene of newsworthy events swiftly. Sometimes the helicopter is also used by journalists of the 'Sydney Morning Herald'.

all Sydney based; *Canberra Times, Newcastle Herald,* Melbourne *Age* (50%), and many suburban newspapers. Its magazine interests include: *Woman's Day, Dolly, People, Cosmopolitan,* and many less well-known titles. Its radio interests include: 2GB (Sydney), 3XK (Melbourne), and 4BH (Brisbane).

- **'Murdoch Group' (News Corporation Ltd):** Has TV interests in TEN 10 (Sydney), ATV 10 (Melbourne) and many other stations. Its newspaper interests include: *The Australian, Telegraph, Sunday Telegraph,* all Sydney based; papers in Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide, Canberra and Darwin, and many suburban ones, and others in U.S.A., Britain, New Zealand.

- **'Packer Group' (Consolidated Press Holdings Ltd):** Has TV interests in TCN 9 (Sydney), GTV 9 (Melbourne), TVQ 7 (Brisbane), WIN 4 (Wollongong), and some others. Its newspaper interests extend to more than 20 suburban/provincial papers. Its magazine interests include: *Women's Weekly, Home Journal, The Bulletin, Cleo,* and many less well-known titles. Its radio interests: 3AK (Melbourne), 6PM (Perth), and several other stations.

- **'Herald & Weekly Times Group':** Has television interests in HSV 7 (Melbourne), ADS 7 (Adelaide), TVT 9 (Hobart), and many others. Its newspaper interests include: *Herald, Sun News Pictorial,* and *Age* (50%), all Victorian; and many papers in other states. Its magazine interests: *Australasian Post, Home Beautiful, Your Garden,* and several others. Its radio interests: 4BK (Brisbane), 3AK and 3DB (Melbourne), and many others.

Possible Questions and Activities

► Where do the TV stations that are available in your area (ABC and commercial) obtain the funds needed to present their programs? Who owns these stations? How does the ownership of TV in your area compare with the broader pattern of ownership throughout Australia?

► Explore pupil and parent attitudes to ABC TV by collecting opinions and program preferences: Should there be a 'two-layer' system, or all commercial, or all government-funded? How does the performance of the ABC compare with that of the commercials? And so on . . . Write to the ABC for an historical outline of its activities, a map of its coverage of the Australian population, and current information on funding by the federal government, the role of the management of the Corporation, and plans for the future.

► Form groups to write to the locally available commercial TV stations. While inquiring about ownership, a broader subject approach might be taken, e.g. 'As part of a Social Studies project, we are writing as viewers of your channel to inquire about the enterprise that lies behind the programs. Would you kindly supply answers to the following questions?
- When did your channel begin public transmission?
- Has there been considerable growth since then?
- How many people do you employ?
- Do you disclose your annual revenue from advertising?
- Who owns the channel? Who manages it?
- Does the owner exercise any influence on programming?
- Or is programming wholly controlled by the management?'

[Add other questions.]

► Since commercial television depends on advertising revenues, doesn't this mean that the sole criterion of programming is the mass popularity of shows—not informational, educational or other criteria?

► Why do some critics say that commercial TV is owned by far too few firms? Does it matter?

► Find out about the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal. How extensive is its power to supervise Australian television? Does it use its powers?

► Find out about cable TV and the increasing role of satellites. How will developments like these increase the range of home viewing? What effects could such increased range have on the present narrow control of commercial television by the 'Big 4'?

N.B. *For the end of the course, this probe extends the Probe 1 discussion.*

It is a question for each pupil to answer. Reform of Australian television is an adult operation pursued by dedicated though unfortunately small groups. But every adult and every child needs to think out an attitude to the place of TV in his or her life. There is no point in saying children are too young to do this. Every child has already amassed thousands of hours of TV experience and faces every day the problem, 'How much TV, and which TV, shall I watch?'

So, drawing on all our previous inquiries, let us take the class on a final walk which will show them five 'wider perspectives', each suggesting that a viewer needs

to use television, not be used by it;
to get from it the best it has to offer;
to limit it so other things don't suffer.

In short, to make up one's own mind about TV, thoughtfully.

(i) **Consider the Ratings.** Using surveys, researchers regularly determine who is watching what. A 'rating' of, say, 30 means that 30 out of every 100 TV-owning households in a city are watching a particular show at a particular time. The commercial channels compete bitterly to win 'the ratings battle' knowing that the winners can charge the highest fees for the advertising they will intrude into their shows. Thus there is an obvious financial criterion governing the channels' choice of shows: shows are chosen for their predicted *mass appeal* rather than their quality.

► 'Should I, an individual free to think for myself, be swayed by the ratings? Why can't I make up my own mind according to my own ideas of quality?'

Moreover, at any one time most people are watching a variety of programs. So there is little reason to look to 'good ratings'—mass appeal—as one's guide to what is worth viewing.

► Conduct a class survey (or use one conducted earlier) to determine pupils' favourite shows across a week's viewing. Then, in discussion, compare one another's reasons for preferring this or that show.

(ii) **Consider How Taste Varies from State to State.** Not only are there marked variations of preference *within* a given community but they can also be found from state to state. Glen Kinging, program manager for Channel 7 in Sydney, says this variation is 'one of the great mysteries' of television (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 14/11/1983).

For example, the ratings for *Carson's Law* commonly run at 25 in Melbourne but drop to 15-16 in Sydney. Another example: *The Dismissal*, a dramatisation of the fall of the Whitlam Government in 1975, drew ratings of 42 in Sydney, 36 in Brisbane, 32 in Melbourne, and 28 in Adelaide.

The variations emphasise again that there can be no *mass guide* as to what is a good show—one must make up one's own mind.

► Locate a show about which viewer opinion varies widely, then choose four pupils who represent the spread of opinion, ask them to write out their reasons, and present the four pieces for class discussion and comparison.

(iii) **Consider the Multicultural Element in TV.** Most of the programs on our screens have originated in just a few countries and so offer a little cultural diversity. How much?

► Ask for examples of British-made, American-made, and Australian-made programs. Can any cultural differences be discerned between them? (Allow the broadest of generalisations.) Incidentally, try to find what it can cost to make an hour of TV drama. Why are there are so many repeat programs? Why aren't there more Australian programs?

Most programs shown in 'Children's Hour' (4-5 p.m.) are foreign-made, but in October 1983 the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal strongly recommended that at least 50% of programs should be produced by residents of Australia. This is being considered by managers of commercial channels as this book goes to press. Some are likely to oppose it, but the independent Australian Children's Television Foundation is enthusiastic.

► Is the increase in Australian content likely to produce shows that will be popular with Australian children? Is the 4-5 p.m. time-slot right—or do many children find it unsuitable?

Channel 0-28, which began transmission in Sydney and Melbourne in October 1980, has widened the multicultural input beyond its longstanding British, American and Australian elements. Government funded, the Channel aims to reflect a cosmopolitan view of the world, to break down cultural stereotypes (the excitable Italian, the thick-headed Irishman, etc.), and to show that our predominantly Anglo-Saxon community has been enriched by the many cultures introduced by waves of immigration from many lands since World War II. 0-28's news programs, with their extensive overseas coverage—in contrast to the local emphasis of the commercial channels' news—and also its foreign language films and series from many countries have already won it a small, stable, grateful following.

► 0-28 has widened the television choices available to us. Ask the children what they know of the channel. Is a 'multicultural channel' a good idea? What does it offer in children's TV? Invite individuals to report to the class on programs viewed on the channel.

(iv) **Consider Some Attitudes Strongly Critical of Present TV Options.** Some parents reach the conclusion that TV is either a shoddy influence or a waste of the time a family can spend doing good things together. They either do without a TV set completely or buy a small portable which is put away and only brought out for special, carefully selected viewing of quality programs. They are inclined to report that, as with smoking, they feel better without it and have no regrets.

► If you can locate such parents, request a letter from them (or a talk), perhaps on 'How our life is better without TV'. If you have told the class the 'Phil Rubinstein story' (p. 66), mention that he, after his long working involvement in television, has chosen to do without TV. Here is part of the conclusion of his article:

> 'We gave our TV set away. With it went family arguments . . . In its place came more books, board games, musical instruments, hobbies, conversation, singing, time for each other—and God.
>
> 'Our house is more of a home, and less like a motel. If our three children want to see a particular program, we are happy to visit friends with a set, or the public library. But they've come to prefer people and books.' (*Television—A New Look for Viewers*, 22)

Short of getting rid of the set, a number of families who hate commercial advertising seldom shift from the ABC. Some also turn to 0-28. When the ABC and 0-28 don't have a show that appeals to them,

Pupils examine television guides to estimate the quantity and quality of 'children's television' available across the channels in a typical week.

they don't mind—there's plenty else to do. They read. Or make things. Or talk. Or turn to radio.

A growing number follow radio keenly, knowing it offers a much wider range of stations and programs than TV. And, instead of just sitting, one can be active while listening—make things, exercise, cook, clean up, whatever.

Others make thoughtful use of their new video recorders. They tape good programs for repeated viewing and hire video cassettes with as much care as they take when choosing library books. No longer is there any reason, they say, to be dependent on the channels.

And now the home microcomputer has arrived! It too has great potential for lessening dependence on TV. As well as its practical functions, such as keeping the family budget, it has entertainment and educational functions realisable through heaps of available 'software'—programs which range from video-games and quizzes to general knowledge and specific learning. Probably most significant is yet another function: the computer can easily be switched (by special software) to take on a 'word processor' role. Reversing the passive role which TV thrusts on viewers, the 'word processor' makes creative composing possible—by typing a draft onto the computer's screen, editing and polishing it, then tapping a key to secure an instant 'printout' of the writing. The home com-

puter boom is advancing rapidly. One in ten Australian families has a set at the end of 1983. The United States alone already offers more than 30,000 software items (*Time*, 19/12/83). Only the future will tell how much the sets will be used for family business, entertainment, learning, or creative composing respectively. Time spent on any of these functions is likely to be taken from time devoted previously to TV viewing.

► Ask the class to consider the range of options above:
- Throw out the TV?
- Chiefly watch ABC TV and 0-28?
- Listen to carefully chosen radio?
- Choose the best video shows?
- Make full use of a home computer?
- Watch all the channels—but pick the best programs!

(Investigate also the variety which will open up with the coming of *cable television* in the not distant future.)

(v) **Consider the Choices beyond Electronic Entertainment.** Finally, project from all the alternatives discussed above to consider the wider choices life offers:
- family activities, visits, and outings;
- activities with friends;
- exercise and sport;
- the infinite range of available reading;
- pursuit of a craft, art, or musical instrument;
- home study;
- religious observance, church fellowship.

Putting everything together leads to an inescapable conclusion: modern life offers each of us an amazingly wide choice of activities, TV being only one, and often not the worthiest. To feel bored because 'there isn't anything good on TV' is to be at fault oneself for not thoughtfully turning to something drawn from that amazing range of possibilities.

► One class, after a 'walk' which showed them these five 'perspectives', developed personal estimates of 'My Present Lifestyle', each concluding with a common sentence: 'This is how I see my life today, but I am now aware of so many choices that I know I will be continually experimenting to improve the quality of my life in the future'. . . . In every piece of their writing, they consciously set limits to TV-watching within their whole range of activities—*they saw TV in perspective.*

This Probe has been developed into 30 units and is presented on pages 61-73 as a self-contained chapter of the book. Its principles can be adapted to the study of advertising in radio, newspapers and magazines.

Can TV Be Changed for the Better?

Beyond the improving of personal attitudes to TV-viewing, what can be done by community effort to cause television stations to produce programs of better taste or quality? Some teachers already contribute to such efforts, others may wish to do so, and all teachers should know where to direct parents who ask what can be done.

- **Write to a TV Station.** If a program offends, viewers can spontaneously ring the station responsible, but it is more effective to write a polite, firm, factual letter stating the date and time of the program and the reasons for complaint. And if the reply is unsatisfactory (or if none is received), a further letter should be written. Or the complaint might be set out in a letter to a newspaper or to the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal.

- **Write to the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal.** The ABT, set up by Commonwealth legislation, is the public body charged with protecting the public interest in relation to television. It has often disappointed the hopes of reformers—mainly because of the influence upon it of a lobby of commercial TV interests which strives to keep things much as they are. Greater public involvement with the ABT will counteract this influence. Hence the value of writing to the ABT. Even more valuable would be participation in a reforming organisation such as those listed below.

An example of ABT sluggishness. When the Australian Consumers' Association called on the ABT in 1982 to check 'inaccurate and suggestive television advertising', citing 127 advertisements which breached law and industry codes, an ABT report rejected the submission in a manner which ACA spokesman Alan Asher described as 'outrageous'. The report had said there should be tolerance of a certain amount of 'puffiness' in advertisements, or licence with the truth. This 'bears out our contention that the Tribunal is not doing its job,' said Mr Asher. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 30/12/1983).

- **Directory.** The Australian Broadcasting Tribunal has an office in every state 'consult a phone book for an address). In the specific area of children's television, the following national and state bodies carry on very useful work to improve programming:

• NATIONAL:

Australian Council for Children's Films and Television, 11 Parliament Place, East Melbourne VIC 3002

• STATES:

ACT Council for Children's Films and Television, P.O. Box 344, Civic Square ACT 2608

NSW Council for Children's Films and Television, P.O. Box 202, Northbridge NSW 2063

Queensland Council for Children's Films and Television, 16 Sophia Street, Kenmore QLD 4069

South Australian Council for Children's Films and Television, 56 Barton Terrace, North Adelaide SA 5006

Tasmanian Council for Children's Films and Television, 244 Churchill Avenue, Sandy Bay TAS 7005

Victorian Council for Children's Films and Television, 15 Princeton Road, Mount Waverley, VIC 3149

Western Australian Council for Children's Films and Television, P.O. Box 579, Fremantle WA 6160.

betrayed
I a stranger and ~~afraid~~
In a world I never made
A.E. Housman

2
Learning to 'Read' Television Ads

30 Steps in Learning to 'Read' TV Ads

In this world where we adults are exposed to some 500 advertising messages a day and our children will have watched 350,000 TV commercials by age 18—why, why, why isn't every schoolchild taught systematically to distinguish false from true in advertising?

Is any aspect of functional literacy more urgent than this?

Australia is the third most ad-soaked nation in the world (after U.S.A. and South Africa). Its billion dollar advertising industry strenuously promotes a pervasive 'curriculum' which, every day, educates the young in a spending lifestyle.

The Need for a Counter-Strategy

Mere skimreading of the ads is in fact a state of illiteracy, for TV ads in particular are designed to persuade the subconscious mind even more than the conscious. So the conscious mind has to learn to be critical: it must confront the persistent assaults of the advertisers with a counter-strategy of critical questioning—questioning which is largely a skill of knowing *how to read between the lies*!

Asking the Right Questions

Of course not all advertising is misleading. We have a right to expect that good advertising will straightforwardly announce a product, its price, and its availability. Most 'classifieds'—the short, less expensive ads in newspapers—are straightforward enough. But advertising tends to become more misleading as it becomes more expensive, and TV advertising, which is always very expensive, tends to be the most misleading of all.

So we need to 'read' the TV ads with questions in mind:

- *Why this glossy APPEAL*—to the wish to be young, lovely, sexy, etc?
- *Why the dramatic VOICE*—of super-enthusiasm, forced caring, etc?
- *What about ALTERNATIVES*—aren't competing products just as good?

> 'There really isn't any significant difference between the various brands of whisky or the various cigarettes or the various brands of beer. They are all about the same. And so are the cake mixes and the detergents and the automobiles.' . . . This is the opinion of David Ogilvy, president of a large advertising agency. It means that often only the advertising makes the (artificial!) difference between competing products.

Brainstorm the class's favourite ads. Vote to select the top two or three. Then list reasons for their appeal (images? characters? words? music? story? . . .) The spontaneous tendency of the class is to treat the ads solely as entertainment, but at the right moment raise the question, 'But are ads presented for entertainment—is that their purpose? . . . If their real purpose is something else, then why are they presented as entertainment?'

Ads can help us in finding out about available goods and services, about new products, bargain sales and coming events. BUT is TV the only or the best source of such information? Ask the children to inquire of their parents about the best sources of information (e.g. newspapers, the yellow pages of the phone book, trade directories, ringing or writing to a government health, education, welfare or other agency, consulting an expert, asking friends, etc.) . . . *In general, never rely on a single TV commercial; always compare what it offers with what competitors are offering. A competitor may have a better product but lack the money to promote it on TV.* (N.B. No viewer really 'needs' TV advertising, since virtually all its promotions are available through other media; chiefly it is the advertisers who 'need' TV advertising—and only the wealthier advertisers can afford to use it.)

An obvious question? Not really. As children discuss it in relation to TV advertising, it can lead in interesting directions . . . 'A person with something to sell who advertises on TV.' Any person? 'Well, a firm or company.' Any firm—local ones, for instance? 'No, big ones. They need a lot of money.' Do all wealthy firms advertise on TV? 'No, it doesn't suit all of them—big construction firms, for instance, they don't usually want to reach a TV audience.' What is it about the TV audience that interests advertisers? 'It's a mass audience—people who buy *consumer goods and services.*' The class might then consider what an average family's consumption needs are—quite a list! It is a list that reveals 'mass consumerism' to be the principal area of interest of TV advertisers.

(Note the quotation from the advertising executive, above 30.1.) There is of course a *degree* of difference between competing products but typically a TV ad exaggerates the difference by presenting misleading images or claims. Draw the children into preparing *A TEST*, e.g. buy three much advertised brands of margarine, allow children to spread a small piece of bread from each, savouring it as they do, then produce three more pieces spread out-of-sight from them—see whether they can identify these. Total confusion! (Margarine firms do make claims for superiority other than flavour—how seriously can non-specialists take these?) . . . Ask children to think of other products in which differences are likely to be largely illusory (toothpaste, soap, detergent, cigarettes, etc.).

Many (though not all) advertising agencies consider themselves professionally obliged to take their client's product and present it in glowing terms, even though they personally feel no conviction about it. (Compare this with the lawyer who knows his client *did* commit the crime.) As skilled presenters they can make the product appear to have merits far beyond its real worth . . . Ask the class if they approve of such ethics. Ask them to simulate such an adman's role by devising a relatively worthless product and then promoting it using every resource of human ingenuity. For example, lightly sugared bottled tapwater could become *Tono-Bungay*, the 'New Formula Pure Cordial for Joy and Youthful Energy'—promoted by jingles, slogans, superlatives, extravagant claims, testimonials by white-coated experts, and images of gloriously carefree girls and boys.

Ask this matter-of-fact question now the class has experienced admaking from the inside with 'Tono-Bungay'. Make this incidentally a thinking exercise: 'How shall we carefully think this out?' Perhaps . . . first, brainstorm by jotting down whatever the class can think of; second, test the list of points against a real case (e.g. Exactly what would you want to know before buying a bicycle?); third, examine various printed ads to see what information they supply; fourth, sum up with a full list of points. Then ask, 'Do TV ads usually supply *all* this needed information?' What is sometimes withheld—and why? What is often added apart from the necessary information—and why? (This last question prepares the way for 30.7.)

'But is there any real difference between one brand of margarine and another—apart from the price and the advertising claims?'

Ask every child to think this out and write an answer without the help of prior discussion. Then pool the first-draft writing by having it read aloud—and discussed. Finally, everyone can write a more considered version (which might include reference to personalities, actors, models, story, action, scenes, images, symbols, cartoon elements, spoken words, dramatic voices, printed words, jingles, slogans, music, sound effects).

Before attempting the relatively complex task of scripting an ad for TV, get some practice in writing ads for the print media. For example, choose a product, say, 'Redhen's Easter Eggs' or 'Mother's Own Christmas Pudding', then follow the A-I-D-A formula used by advertising writers

A . . . Attention-getting opening.
I . . . Interest in every sentence.
D . . . Desire that appeals to readers.
A . . . Action you want readers to take.

A good process-of-writing is to get a first draft down roughly, then use A-I-D-A to check, revise and polish it. Every word must count. The fewer words the better, so cut out as much detail as possible. Keep thinking hard about the reader ('consumer') and the *appeal* that is most likely to persuade him or her. Perhaps write several drafts until the ad not only reads smoothly but can be smoothly spoken aloud — trim, polished writing which carries the tones of excited, easy-flowing speech.

Using what has been learnt, ask the class as a whole, or groups, to work out a responsible TV ad which will give viewers the information they want about a product or service that could meet a real need, e.g. a 'Life Be In It' promotion of regular exercise. Hold a 'creative planning session' to decide on (i) a message and purpose, (ii) the information the target audience will expect to receive, (iii) a popular athlete who can be associated with the promotion, (iv) a bright idea for a 'story' which will convey the message in 30-90 seconds of TV time, (v) the pupils who will devise the various 'ingredients' of the commercial. (Look back to Probe 17 on scriptwriting and make a script which includes any relevant 'ingredient'; rehearse and enact in class, using mock or real cameras; better still, if possible make a video.)

N.B. *This is only a first attempt at TV adscripting and further attempts can be made as understanding of TV advertising develops throughout the year.*

Having had the experience of making a TV ad, the class can be invited to play a little game suggested by an ex-advertising man, Phil Rubinstein (see 30.12). He calls it 'Spot-the-Salesman'. Behind a commercial, he says, is a 'sales team of psychologists, writers, researchers, film-makers—the hidden persuaders in your living room'. The game is simply to close your eyes after a commercial and picture the people who made it—picture real people, of different ages, doing

ordinary things. Rubinstein's idea is like a pin pricked into a hot air balloon—the fantasy and illusion of the commercial is deflated, bringing it down to earth . . .

'Close your eyes. Think of a high-powered TV ad . . . Now get a picture of the psychologist who advised the production team; he's bespectacled, 59 years old, with a straggly beard and rather crumpled suit . . . Next, the writer, a man in his early forties; he's had a late night, looks worn, and speaks irritably to the psychologist . . . Next, the market researcher, a severe young woman with straight black hair, no make-up, and a weight problem; she isn't saying much but is listening with a disapproving frown to the exchange between the psychologist and the writer . . . Next, the film-maker, a tall, thin, bent beanpole of a man with a trim moustache; he is fortyish and his eyes are half closed as he waits for the others to make up their minds.

A Cartoon Variation. Ask the class to imagine that these 'creative personnel of the advertising world' practise what they preach—and then cartoon the imagined result, e.g. the *psychologist*, promoting 'Eat More Sugar', has lost all but two of his teeth; the *writer*, promoting 'Drink More Beer', has developed an extensive 'beer-gut'; the *market researcher*, promoting 'Eat Fabulous Fast Food', has grown incredibly fat; and the *film-maker*, promoting 'Smoke More Cigarettes', is doubled up by a troublesome lung cancer . . . Infinite variations are conceivable.

To do this effectively, watch a televised commercial in the classroom—preferably one that has few printed words or captions. Play it with the sound turned off, perhaps several times and ask the class to dub in their own words which parody ('send up') the original. This can be hilarious. If the video can't be arranged, simply ask the class to write a script which 'sends up' a well-known product, e.g. 'When the Makers of Koko Pops Told the Truth about Their Product'.

Admen (and adwomen) speak of 'targetting an audience'. They mean finding out exactly who it is that the ad is directed at, so that persuasion techniques can be devised to 'hit the spot' with the needs and desires of that particular audience. Ask the class to think of some 'targets', e.g. young mothers (for baby powder), wealthy people (for luxury cars), teenagers (for jeans). How about children? Brainstorm the main things advertised for children at times when they are viewing (e.g. sweets, drinks, toys, games, fastfoods). What do the advertisers hope the children will do? Is this fair to children—or parents? After some discussion, tell the class—

The Phil Rubinstein Story. Phil Rubinstein worked successfully for 20 years as an advertising expert in New York, London, Sydney and Melbourne. Then one day the chairman of a large British advertising agency said to him: 'I think we need new ways to use the children'. That was too much! 'Something inside me snapped . . . I dropped out, re-examined my values'—and now he prefers to work for less money with the South Australian Health Commission where he feels genuinely able to help children, parents, teachers. (His story is in *Television—A New Look for Viewers*, published by MediaCom Associates, 6 Sheffield Street, Adelaide, S.A. 5061; it offers parents ten ways to prevent commercial television from 'seducing you away from your basic values'.) . . . Why not ask the children to role-play in pairs the scene between Phil and the agency chairman, and extend it to a dispute in which Phil finally states his resolve to get out of advertising and find a profession in which he can help people?

'How may we influence the target audience?' This is the key question in the mind of the admaker. The short answer is—*by appealing* to the strongest wishes or fears of the audience with a promise that this product will make the wish come true or the fear vanish: 'I wish to be popular, so I must eat Wriggledy's Chewing Gum like the happy girls and boys in the TV ad' . . . 'I want to get rid of my pimples, so I must buy Nirvana Skin Cream like the boy in the before-and-after TV ad'. Ask the class to make a list of 'appeals' aimed at their own age group, e.g.

Appeal to Appetite: 'M-m-m, delicious . . .' 'Everybody's eating . . .'
Appeal to Thirst: 'So satisfying . . .' 'Choke adds life . . .'

Appeal to Popularity: 'It's trendy . . .' 'Smart kids are changing to . . .'
Appeal to Novelty: 'New, new, new . . .' 'It's the very latest in . . .'
Appeal to Self-indulgence: 'You deserve . . .' 'Give yourself a treat . . .'
Appeal to Fantasy: 'Tina will sing her way into your dreams . . .'

Ask everyone to cut out 3-5 magazine or newspaper ads which have a strong picture element; then draw an arrow to the key point(s) of the picture and label it as such-and-such an appeal, e.g. a plush feature of a luxury car ad is labelled, APPEAL TO DESIRE FOR LUXURY. Make a display of the pictures around the room.

While some 'appeals' are obvious, e.g. the drooling delight of a child stuffing down fried chicken, others are less direct, e.g. a dramatic moment in sport, with a cigarette brand name on a fence in the background. Pin up a number of such ads from magazines so that each pupil can select one and write an explanation of the connection that the advertiser wants to achieve in a viewer's mind between the brand name and the event. Also watch for psychological devices such as 'identification' (e.g. a person the viewer would like to resemble) or 'reference groups' (e.g. people the viewer would like to join).

'Give yourself a treat! . . .' An advertising jingle composed by a group of eight year olds is recorded and filmed by technicians from Year 6. (See Probe 30.24.)

This could become a long-term research project. Ask the children to form small groups, each to investigate the unsupported claims of any TV ad the group chooses. For example, look into the health claims of one of the breakfast foods. Compare the quality (and price) with a wholemeal porridge; look up books on nutrition, write to health authorities, see if *Choice*, the journal of the Australian Consumers' Association, has featured this problem. The groups, completing their projects at different times, can report findings to the class, first stating the impression given by the TV ad and then comparing this with what has been discovered. While this project is proceeding, 30.17 can be carried through in a more concentrated way.

Brainstorm a list of the recent TV promotions of foods and drinks. Most have featured highly processed products, much of it loaded with salt, sugar or fat. What is meant by 'natural foods'? Try to agree on a definition. Do many good foods seldom (or never) get a mention in TV ads—why? Let's talk and read about 'good diets'. Consult Mum and Dad and bring the ideas to class. Consult books in the library. Invite a well-informed parent to give a talk. Or a doctor. Or two or three parents might come as a Panel to discuss the problem and answer the class's questions. Every pupil can write a report. Highlights of the reports can be collected in a newsletter sent home to all parents . . . *Conclusion:* There are better places to look for advice on healthful food and drinks than the TV ads! (Teacher reference: Look up, 'A Feast of Deficiency', in *Education News*, the Commonwealth Department of Education journal, September 1983.)

When the cigarette manufacturers were forbidden by law to advertise on TV, they became sponsors of the major televised sporting events. The result is that their sponsorship signs are beamed into homes by TV as the games proceed—producing an association between smoking and sport, the unhealthy and the healthy. Ask the class which brand names are associated with cricket, tennis, football and other sports. Should governments prevent this? Some state governments tried to do so at a meeting of Health Ministers in 1983, but the 'smoking lobby' used pressures to prevent action from being taken. Ask the class to write an opinion on this subject. If the sponsorships were withdrawn, wouldn't sport suffer?

Extend the previous discussion by asking the class to inquire seriously into the effects of smoking on health. This could be part of a major Social Studies project: search for information in the school and local libraries, ask parents for opinions, invite a doctor or chemist to give a talk, write to the Health Depart-

ment in your state, or to the National Heart Foundation of Australia, Townshend Street, Phillip, A.C.T. 2606.

[Dr Paul Magnus, of the Heart Foundation, presented some of the 'massive' evidence against cigarette smoking in a letter to the *Sydney Morning Herald* (1/11/83). He listed 'prestigious independent world sources' which condemned smoking as a health hazard, including 'the Medical Research Council of Great Britain and the four major US health organisations', 'the UK Royal College of Physicians and the Advisory Committee of the US Surgeon General'. Then he added: 'All the respected Australian health bodies—including the cancer societies, the Heart Foundation, the National Health and Medical Research Council, the Commonwealth Department of Health, and the various medical colleges—unanimously concur with the long standing world medical opinion.' It has been clear to medical research since as early as 1953 that smokers are up to 20 times more likely to develop lung cancer than non-smokers.]

If the class's inquiry into the effects of smoking leads to the view that it is certainly a health hazard, then why not suggest that a letter be drafted, urging the Health Minister in your state to revive the 1983 attempt to ban cigarette sponsorship of sport?

The class has had a week to notice overstatements in the vocabulary of the advertisers—now, in a brainstorming session, the teacher writes up what they have found.

Advertisers, and not least the TV admakers, ceaselessly pour out superlatives—words and phrases of extreme exaggeration. Ask the class to write down, without prior discussion, as many superlatives/key words/emotive words (or phrases) as they can think of. Then fill a board with a collective list . . . *fabulous, fantastic, superfine, nature's finest*, etc. Later, underline ten of these words and ask the class to suggest more moderate synonyms for them.

This is the opinion of Ian Fairweather, who has spent a career in television striving to raise its standards. Does the class agree? The question calls for consideration of values: 'Without thinking recklessly in an if-I-were-a-millionaire spirit, consider what are the necessary and desirable things that people want in an ordinary life (not only objects but activities and relationships)—from a glass of water or a game after school to friendship and a good job—then consider how few of these are the subject of helpful TV ads.'

This is an activity that can be repeated periodically. Divide the class into groups of, say, four pupils. Give each group a magazine ad with a strong visual element and ask them to 'read' it critically, using an agreed approach whose minimum features might be: (i) Who is the seller? (ii) What is being sold? (iii) How much basic information is given? (iv) Is any necessary information not supplied? (v) What techniques of persuasion are emphasised?

Not considering, for the moment, the camera work or acting, write a script promoting an imaginary product and use every possible superlative and persuasive appeal. Then rewrite the script so that it tells the sober truth about the product. (See also Probes 17 and 27.)

Think up a number of products and for each write a catchy jingle of two or more lines. Or write a poem of any length about TV ads. Teachers as well as pupils should try their hand at writing such poems, e.g.

Dear Children . . .

Watch the lovely telly ads
all colour, charm and humour—
you will learn that Happiness
means being a consumer.

Viewer to Adman

Hey, stop a moment, adman—
You're spoiling my TV!
These ads must cost a fortune,
And the cost's passed on to me.

Don't tell me it's my happiness
That you're concerned about:
Your hand is in my pocket
And I wish you'd take it out.

Not all your clever pictures
Nor all your breathless claims
Will rush me into buying things—
Whatever their brand names.

I'll hear a proposition
If you'll put it plain and straight;
Good reasons can persuade me
But tall claims—*they don't rate*!

Repeat the experience of 'Tono-Bungay' (30.5) by devising a product for the teenage market and then producing a TV ad which resorts, reckless of truth, to every technique of persuasion. (A record album? surfboard? bicycle? 'trendy gear'?)

The initials *B.U.G.A. U.P.* first appeared on billboards in 1979. Now a common sight, they stand for Billboard Utilising Graffitists Against Unhealthy Promo-

tions. It is not an organisation with a membership but simply anyone who takes a can of spray-paint and writes critical words on an ad. Mostly this action is taken against 'legal drugs', including tobacco and alcohol.

Is this '*defacing* private property', as the opponents of B.U.G.A. U.P. allege?

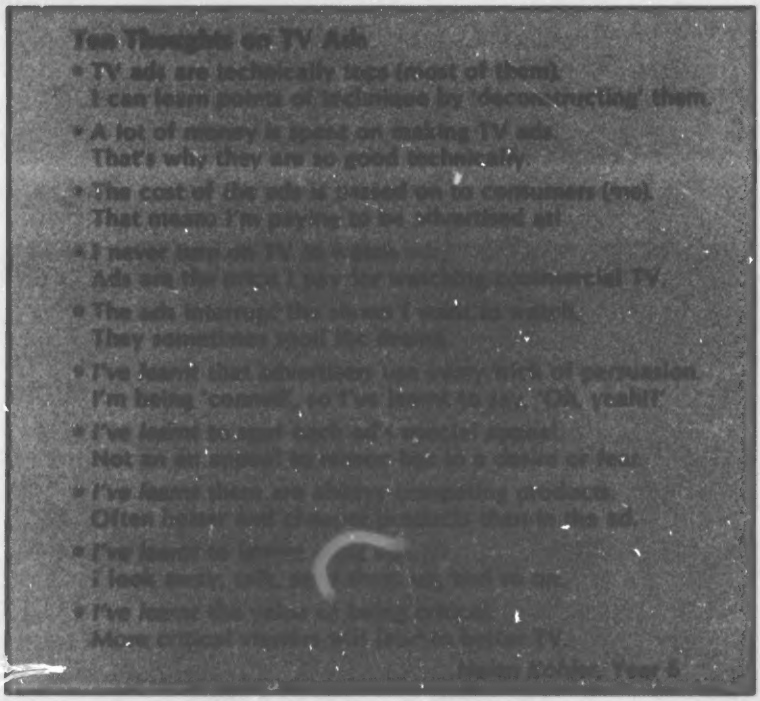
Or is it '*refacing* ads which promote unhealthy or dangerous products', as the defenders of B.U.G.A. U.P. reply?

This dispute can produce a lively exchange of views whether through a group or class discussion, a formal debate, or the reading out of a variety of thoughtful written opinions.

Spraying words onto a billboard is not legal and can bring a small fine. But there is nothing illegal about cutting ads from magazines or newspapers and 'refacing' them by changing or adding words or images. In fact this can be a useful exercise, at once critical and creative. Why not experiment with it? Pupils sometimes find it easier to draw up their own revised version of an ad rather than work on the printed original. Several points-of-view are always possible, e.g. that of an outright opponent who rejects the ad completely; or a gentle critic; or a humorist who wants to play with words and situations; or a producer of a competing product who believes his own product is superior.

Television could be a marvellous medium for promoting good ideas and noble social ideals. Ask the class to compile a list of such ideas and ideals, e.g. ideas for diet and exercise, ideals of anti-pollution, conservation, and an end to intolerance, racism and war. Ask everyone to choose a positive idea or ideal and draw up, first a poster ad, then a TV script about it. Later, discuss why TV's immense potential for good is so seldom realised.

Discuss or debate the attitude of this parent . . . He became resentful of the way the commercial TV channels were urging his children to buy this and that. 'Let's make a rule in this house,' he said, 'whereby we will buy nothing new that is advertised during children's TV times. They are getting at you! And after all, there are plenty of goods available elsewhere—but you wouldn't think of them if you didn't go out to find them. TV is unnecessarily suggestive! I'm not against you making requests, but they've got to come from some source other than TV.'



Ask each pupil to clarify her or his attitude in the light of what has been learned in working through the previous probes . . . Discuss, jot down opinions, then assemble the opinions, either in an article or, more pointedly, in a poster-style set of brief opinions—a kind of 'Advertisement for Myself'—under a headline such as, 'My Attitude to TV Ads'.

Discussion Starters:

(1) A Defence of TV Ads

Common arguments from station executives and advertisers:

- There would be no commercial TV without ads.
- The ads are of a high technical standard.
- They inform people about available products.
- They stimulate wants and hence economic activity.
- People patronise commercial channels —they can't mind ads!

(2) A Defence against TV Ads

While some ads are reasonably informative and not unpleasant, others are irrational, emotive and offensive, and a number are downright dishonest and dangerous (e.g. cigarette sponsorship of sport). So individuals need to think out a personal defence against the large, negative sector of TV advertising. Children especially need to be helped to develop such a defence.

'Individuals, groups and committees have put the case for limiting or banning advertising during morning and evening children's viewing time. They have argued that rational purchasing decisions are difficult for the immature and credulous child who is especially vulnerable to emotional appeals, and that advertising is in fact an indirect form of pressure on television.'—Pat Edgar, *Education News*, No. 11, 1979.

More than a nice smile! The radio announcer must have a warm and welcoming voice that fully uses the intimate nature of the medium. (This is Bob Moore of the Macquarie Network.)

I. What the Teacher Needs to Know

On a typical morning in any one of Australia's capital cities between 7.00 and 8.00 a.m., almost half the population is listening to radio! No fewer than 86 per cent of all Australians listen to the radio, averaging 3 hours 14 minutes a day.

The Nature of the Medium

Radio is a very *intimate* and *personal* medium. The disc jockey or compere or host becomes well known to the listener — indeed, becomes a friend or even a confidant who can be phoned on the open-line and told the most personal secrets while all the world eavesdrops.

'Spend the next few hours with me,' coos the evening broadcaster. 'Pour yourself a drink, settle back and we'll play a few records together.'

The intimacy is most obvious in the open-line programs where listeners often begin their calls with a personal compliment and a declaration of loyalty.

'Hullo, John. I just rang to say I love your show; I wouldn't miss it for the world. Now, can I ask your advice about something that has been worrying me for a long time?'

Radio has also been called a *blind* medium. The receiver of the broadcast message sees nothing of the sender. There is complete dependence on what is heard.

For this reason, the broadcaster's voice is very important: *tone* and *pitch* help carry the message, while *warmth, clarity* and *sincerity* make it acceptable.

Another special characteristic of radio is its *immediacy*. It can provide an as-it-happens coverage of news, weather, traffic conditions and so on.

The Person Up-Front

The announcer, of course, is the person who does the actual communicating with the listeners. The image of the station is projected through his or her voice and personality.

It's important to realise, however, that the announcer is just one member of a team. Working behind the scenes are programmers, researchers, journalists, scriptwriters, advertising-time salesmen and technical staff — not to mention the station administrators. And as with newspapers, a number of 'gatekeepers' sort and select the material that will finally find itself on the air waves.

Who Owns the Radio Stations?

The newspaper proprietors have extensive interests in commercial broadcasting, but the largest radio network is not privately owned; it belongs to the

Australian Broadcasting Corporation, which has fifteen metropolitan stations and over sixty in country areas.

Commercial radio is very extensive. Within it are two strong centres of ownership, the Macquarie and the Major networks.

Since 1964, the newspaper group, John Fairfax Ltd, has had a controlling interest in the Macquarie network which, as well as a large number of country stations, includes the city stations 2GB, 3AW, 4BH, 5DN, 5IX and 7HO.

The Major network, part of another newspaper group, the Herald & Weekly Times Ltd, similarly has stations in all main cities as well as in country areas.

Different from Television

The arrival of television in Australian homes in 1956-7 seriously affected radio.

The industry only survived by learning that it could do some things better than television and that it should concentrate on these.

Radio is chiefly a wake-up medium (we even have clock radio alarms!) and that is why its 'prime time' is between six and nine in the morning. Far more radio stations are available than TV channels and they collectively offer much more program variety than does television. The portability of radio and the fact that it is a listening medium give it advantages over television; people can enjoy it while doing other things—driving, working or relaxing.

Catering for All Tastes

The radio programs vary from talk and information to gentle music and hard rock. Each station is committed to a particular style and content; it is this predictability that attracts loyal audiences.

Some stations are very popular with young-housewife audiences, some with teenagers, and some with older groups. The special character of each station's audience is significant to advertisers, enabling them to match their products with the audiences most likely to be interested.

The Power of Talk-back

Some stations devote considerable time to talk-back (or open-line) programs. These gradually create a sense of community among their followers; not only does a personal relationship develop between the compere and the individual listener but the audience generally feels it is a 'club' bound together by common concerns.

One Sydney station even adopts the role of match-maker, using its open-line to introduce lonely listeners to each other.

The talk-back compere has become a very influential media figure. He or she frequently selects the topics for discussion, editorialises on the issues of the day and, over a period of time, tends to reinforce certain political and social views. This is an excellent example of a 'media gatekeeper'.

FM Radio

FM radio, rapidly developed since the mid-seventies, has greatly widened the choice available to listeners. The letters stand for Frequency Modulation. FM provides a much better broadcasting system than the older Amplitude Modulation, AM.

FM programs of very high quality (stereo broadcasts are now available) cater for a wide range of taste in music.

Over recent years a number of community groups have become involved in FM broadcasting. There is no doubt that the future will see many organisations conducting their own or sharing FM broadcasting facilities.

II. Learning Activities

Understandings

It is hoped that pupils will gain some of these understandings from the activities of this section:

1. Radio plays a role of some importance in the lives of most Australians.
2. Individuals' tastes in radio programs tend to differ.
3. Radio is often an intimate and personal medium.
4. It can also exhibit immediacy and flexibility.
5. It offers a wide range of formats (e.g. news, talk-back, interviews, music, drama).
6. Each of various formats has its own conventions.
7. Advertising is of crucial importance to commercial radio.
8. The special 'language' of radio relies on *sounds* of voices, music, and various effects.
9. There is close association between commercial radio and other commercial mass media.
10. As with the other media, what is finally broadcast on radio has been checked selectively by a number of 'gatekeepers'.

Relevant Vocabulary

Programs, announcer, host, talk-back, segment, bulletin, network, intimacy, editorialise, broadcast, sound effects, commercial, scriptwriter, diction, prejudice, objective, newsworthy, audience. (*Add to these as the study proceeds.*)

Relevant Values

Discuss expectations of radio at the beginning of the study. Perhaps list some values, such as:

- respect for truth;
- tolerance of others' taste;
- critical appreciation;
- belief in freedom of speech.

At the end, the list can be reviewed.

15 'Readings' of Radio

Ask the children to compile a survey of the radio-listening habits of their families: Who listens to what? When? . . . A classroom graph can collate the findings.

Ask the children to question parents and grandparents about the place of radio ('wireless'?) in the home before TV arrived in 1956-7. Try to get some reports—and invite a parent or grandparent to give a talk or answer questions. While all this is being organised, stimulate an interest in *sound* with—*Elementary Hands-on Activities.* Classroom use of tape-recorders, microphones, speakers, etc., can give an insight into the technical side of radio. They also introduce the work of scriptwriters, producers, broadcasters and technicians:

- Where is the best place to hold the microphone?
- What *sound effects* can be produced using simple materials—cardboard, cellophane, combs, pieces of wood, plastic bottles, and of course the mouth?
- To what extent does background noise interfere with recording? What would broadcasting studios do to overcome this problem?

Listen to radio interviews, discuss their conventions and then record a number conducted by class members:

(a) plan each interview's purpose and content;
(b) carry out a rehearsal;
(c) make the actual recording;
(d) play it back to the audience and seek responses.

After studying a selection of radio ads, ask the children—individually, in pairs, or in small groups—to compose their own ads for a product or activity related to school life, e.g. an ad promoting
the school library;
the school canteen;
a clean playground;
participation in school sports.

Play the best on the school's broadcast system.

Listen to a short segment of talk-back radio:

- what points did the callers make?
- how did the compere respond?

Having identified the conventions of the program and noted more and less effective callers, conduct a classroom talkback. Start with a compere and three callers . . . Discuss their strengths and weaknesses.

Using a cassette recorder, conduct playground interviews on topics of local interest . . . When the interviews are played back to the whole class, discuss:

- the ways interviewees reacted when asked for a comment;
- how 'typical' were the responses, i.e. compared to what the class might have considered to be predictable whole-school attitudes;
- what elements of courtesy, fairness, and relevance were involved?

Ask the class to make inquiries and each prepare a report on the roles of the people who make a radio station work.

At the end of each report, a preferred role can be identified and reasons given for its choice.

Stress the importance of projecting one's voice clearly and strongly. Then ask everyone to choose a not-too-long item from a newspaper—preferably a story with 'human interest'—and, after practice in reading it, present it to the class or a group as a radio news-reader would.

Ask the children to prepare an item of school or family news, writing it carefully, and then reading it to a group or the class, again as a radio news-reader would.

What are the main differences between the two? What are the special attractions of each? (While some aspects of these questions may seem obvious, the presentation of a comparison can be a very useful, even taxing, exercise in thinking for children.)

It is special in that the speaker is not seen and must therefore convey everything by tone of voice. A monotone is obviously dull. An interesting voice ranges up and down, changes pace at appropriate moments, and keeps a basic warmth which is suited to this 'intimate' medium listened to by individuals in lounge rooms, kitchens, bedrooms, cars. The voice needs to be 'speech-easy'—that is, conversational, not formal in the sense of lecturing the listeners . . .

Sample some radio across the dial to become fully aware of typical 'non-visual' radio voices; then ask every pupil to write six spoken sentences, each conveying one of these emotions:

joy	confusion
gratitude	frustration
surprise	anger

and practise speaking these, using if possible a cassette recorder to observe effects.

Divide the class into groups of five pupils. Within each group allocate responsibility for producing five short scripts (to run for 30-60 seconds each):

- an announcer reading the news;
- an announcer presenting 2-3 commercials;
- a talk-back compere answering questions;
- a sports commentator calling a game;
- a disc jockey introducing a pop group.

If possible present the results, after polishing and rehearsal, to the whole class.

Ask the children to attempt, however roughly at this first attempt, the writing of a radio drama script. Here is a typical format for such a script . . .

Crime at the Chemist's

EFFECTS: Theme music, fading to street sounds.

NARRATOR: Two boys about 12 years of age, dressed in casual beach gear, are looking in the window of a Gold Coast chemist's shop.

DON: (confidentially) Listen, Carl, how about we nick two pairs of those sunglasses.

CARL: Hey, don't be crazy, Don! Two pairs of glasses! What if we get busted?

Notice: The speakers' names are clearly set off to the left and are in capitals. Everything not spoken is underlined—all instructions and sound effects, including music.

- Remember that only *sounds* go into the script because only sounds come over radio—no facial expressions, gestures or movements can be written in.

- Keep the *characters*, and especially their voices, distinct from one another—and use their names early in the script and repeat them from time to time.

- Use a *narrator* when explanations can't be worked into the dialogue. But as script-writing skill grows, the narrator will be used less and less.

- Radio is marvellous for permitting *many scene changes*. No expensive settings are needed—a spoken hint is enough to prompt the listeners to create the scenes in their minds. For this reason, radio can easily present even historical drama or fantasy, including space adventure.

- As a scene is nearing its end, provide a *'pointer'* in the dialogue—an indication of what the next scene will be concerned with. For example, in 'Crime at the Chemist's', a scene in which the chemist apprehends the two young shoplifters might end with his words:

  CHEMIST: I'll turn you over to the police. You should be thoroughly ashamed of yourself. (fading)

  The first of these two sentences provides the 'pointer' to the next scene which is concerned with a policeman questioning the boys. It must come across very clearly to the listeners, whereas the second sentence is less vital and a little of it might be lost by some listeners because of 'fading-down'.

- Scenes begin and end with fading—*fading-up* as a new scene begins, and *fading-down* as the scene ends. This can be written into the script. Usually it is enough to write the word 'fading' at the end of a scene, for whatever follows must be faded-up, e.g.

  CARL: O.K. If you're sure we can do it, I'll be in it—but just watch yourself, that's all! (fading)

  The next scene is inside the chemist's shop and it begins with a fade-up of the boys talking conspiratorially

Excitement as a group listens to a 'radio program' they have scripted, rehearsed and now 'broadcast' for the first time.

Radio drama is similar to another form popular in some schools, 'Readers Theatre', which is 'a group reading in a circle, with emphasis on good articulation and the expression of roles through effective reading'. An illuminating summary of Readers Theatre, and its many practical uses, can be found in PETA's 1983 text, *Teaching Literature*, pp. 63-5, which gives this account of its 'eager process':

Typically, the children seek a story from literature . . . . . *they research;*
- they may examine novels, stories, plays, poems . . . . . *they read;*
- in searching and selecting, they communicate . . . . . *they talk;*
- the selection made, they work on a script . . . . . *they write;*
- they produce and rehearse the script . . . . . *they perform orally;*
- performance engages an attentive audience . . . . . *they listen;*
- everyone considers the story and performance . . . . . *they evaluate.*

Using this method, or devising an original story, work up a radio script which shows that a good deal has been learnt from the previous experiment with scriptwriting.

Decide on a range of radio programs and ask individuals, pairs and groups to write, rehearse and present them. Include at least news, interviews, talk-back, drama, some music, and, scattered through, a wide variety of ads. Try to make this a spirited culmination of the course.

Journalists at work in the main News Room of a large modern newspaper. No quiet private study for writing! The photo shows only a small part of a huge, open working area. School writers learning of this scene realise that their classroom writing conditions are not unlike those in which these professionals write.

4
Learning to Read Newspapers

I. What the Teacher Needs to Know

Most Australians read newspapers. In fact, over 85 per cent of adults read one each day; a third of them read two or more.

The Nature of the Medium

Reading a newspaper is not like reading a book, which we begin at the beginning and read continuously through to the end. A newspaper offers a print smorgasbord which can be dipped into at any point.

Some people, whose major interest is sport, begin with the back page. Others skip through the paper quickly looking for items of special interest. Probably most begin with the main story and then turn to browsing.

The editors scatter enticements through their pages inviting the reader's eyes to perform a dance in searching for items to be read—and then often only in part.

Selection and More Selection

If reading a newspaper involves continual selection, its writing and editing involves a great deal more. At every stage of news-gathering, *items are rejected because*:

- *they aren't new any more* (yesterday's news gets stale quickly);
- *they aren't of interest* (the mass audience only wants to know about well-known people and exciting events);
- *they aren't acceptable to the editor* (editors won't conflict with political and other wishes of the paper's owners).

A newspaper's size is always limited, so the end of each day finds many news items left unprinted.

Where Does the News Come From?

The editor, with overall responsibility for what is published, is only the final 'gatekeeper' in a long selection process. Other gatekeepers are:

- *Reporters:* out in the field, they continually make judgments about the newsworthiness of all that is happening.
- *Roundsmen:* they make regular calls on parliament, the courts, local councils, etc., only selecting as newsworthy a fraction of day-by-day events.
- *Feature Writers:* they specialise in certain areas, such as politics, finance, motoring or sport, and select from extensive background material only what will make an interesting article.
- *Overseas News Agencies* (AAP, UPI, AAP-Reuter): every day they select only highlights from the huge range of world events, and despatch these to the newspaper.
- *Sub-editors:* they confront the daily haul of news sent in by reporters, roundsmen, feature writers, and

overseas agencies and, by 'subbing', distil a small fraction which is all that 'makes it' into the paper's columns. Guided by a daily editorial conference, they select, correct, point-up (make sharper and more interesting), and write headlines.

The Style of News Reports

News is reported in a style which is brief and matter-of-fact, yet informative.

The very first sentence, called the *lead* or *intro*, makes the most important point of the story. The second sentence gives some more information and may be a quotation. Later 'paragraphs' (usually of one sentence each) follow in a descending order of importance.

This structure for presenting the news item is called 'the inverted pyramid' and it allows the sub-editor to 'cut' the story swiftly, from the bottom up, by simply dropping whatever won't fit the space available. Enough remains to make sense to the reader.

Journalists check their stories by asking 'the 5Ws': *Who? What? Where? When? Why?* and perhaps also *How?* They then feel confident they haven't left out any information a reader might consider essential.

Direct quotations and active voice are used to keep the story sounding dramatic.

What Should We Expect of a Newspaper?

Readers should evaluate a newspaper for at least four qualities:

(1) *Truthful News Presentation:* an ob-

A journalist using a VDT (visual display terminal). He has called up a dictionary entry to settle a point of spelling. Later he will type his story onto the screen, revise it if necessary, then consign it to the computer's 'memory', from which it can be summoned up by a sub-editor who will decide if it can be used in the next edition of the paper and, if so, whether it needs to be 'cut' to fit the available space and how it will be headlined.

Newspapers are in the forefront of applications of computerisation. This 'computer room' of a large modern newspaper is a busy centre which is linked to the VDTs throughout the enterprise and receives communications from all over Australia and the wider world.

jective and balanced account of newsworthy events, free of
sensationalism;
unsupported or misleading statements;
bias, such as only one side of a story;
suppression of vital information;
outright lies.

(2) *Helpful Interpretations:* opinions and 'backgrounding' presented through editorials, special articles, cartoons and letters.

(3) *Interest and Entertainment:* basically, lively writing which reports and comments on the news, but supplemented with human interest stories, reviews of films, books and records, feature articles, and competitions and games—all this provided minor or trivial material does not take precedence over items of importance.

(4) *Services:* TV and radio programs, weather information, coming events, marketing news, and of course a wide range of advertisements.

Who Owns the Print Media?

Australia is a leader in the worldwide trend towards media monopoly.

Whereas in the 1920s there were 26 metropolitan daily newspapers in Australia, controlled by 21 different owners, today just 3 companies control all 16 of the big dailies!

• **John Fairfax & Sons Ltd**

NEWSPAPERS:

The Sun (Sydney)
Sydney Morning Herald
Sun-Herald (Sydney)
National Times
Financial Review
Canberra Times
Herald and *Sun* (Newcastle)
The Age (Melbourne) (50%)

MAGAZINES:

People
Pol
Belle
Dolly
Woman's Day
Cosmopolitan
Walkabout

• News Corporation Ltd

NEWSPAPERS:

The Australian
Daily Mirror (Sydney)
Sunday Mirror (Sydney)
Daily Telegraph (Sydney)
Sunday Telegraph (Sydney)
Sunday Sun (Brisbane)
Sunday Times (Perth)
The News (Adelaide)

MAGAZINES:

New Idea *Sportsman*

• Herald & Weekly Times Ltd

NEWSPAPERS:

The Herald (Melbourne)
Sun News-Pictorial (Melbourne)
The Age (Melbourne) (50%)
West Australian (Perth)
Courier Mail (Brisbane)
Sunday Mail (Brisbane)
and many less prominent.

MAGAZINES:

Australasian Post *Your Garden*
Home Beautiful *Aircraft*
Listener In—TV

(See also Probe 28, pp. 53-4, for the extensive interests of these three companies in TV and radio.)

A fourth 'media monopoly', **Consolidated Press Holdings Ltd**, has no major newspapers but is powerful in magazine production, with

Women's Weekly *Home Journal*
The Bulletin *Cleo*

and many less well-known titles.

A small part only of the extensive printing plant needed by a modern newspaper, but enough to suggest the enormous investment of capital needed in this branch of the communications industry.

II. Learning Activities

It is hoped that pupils will gain some of these understandings from the activities of this section:

Understandings

1. There are many different types of newspapers.
2. Newspapers have very large readerships.
3. People's tastes in newspapers, and reading habits generally, tend to differ.
4. Newspapers print only a fraction of all the news available.
5. An individual layout is an important convention of every newspaper.
6. News stories are written in a special style called the 'inverted pyramid'.
7. Advertising is of crucial importance to the newspaper industry.
8. Some newspapers are more successful than others in meeting commonly expected responsibilities.
9. The newspaper industry is mostly controlled by three powerful companies.
10. Newspapers are structured in a particular way with each section having its own conventions.

Relevant Vocabulary

Selection, editing, slant, bias, newsworthy, editorialise, subjective, objective, functions, broadsheet, tabloid, subediting, daily, weekly, proprietor, journalist, sensational, prejudice, emotive, balance, lay-out, circulation. (*Add to these as the study proceeds.*)

Relevant Values

Discuss expectations of newspapers at the beginning of the study. Perhaps list some values, such as:
respect for truth;
tolerance of different viewpoints;
commitment to fairness;
belief in freedom of speech.
At the end, the list can be reviewed.

15 'Readings' of Newspapers

Ask the children to survey, first, the reading habits of their parents, using the headings 'Books', 'Newspapers', 'Magazines'. Try to establish roughly the amount of time spent with each, and if possible invite parents' opinions on the degree to which each is valued. Second, focus on newspapers, asking questions such as:

- Which papers come into the home?
- Do both parents read them?
- Is 'tabloid' or 'broadsheet' form preferred?
- Which section is read first?
- Name 3-4 main interest areas?
- Is newspaper news considered more reliable than news from TV or radio?
- Does either parent have a criticism of their newspaper(s)?

Ask the children to write their findings as a report, and circulate the reports in groups, reading some of the most interesting to the whole class.

Ask the children to bring a variety of newspapers to school. When each is supplied with a morning and an evening 'tabloid' and a morning 'broadsheet', use a number of lessons in exploring what they contain. *Here are some possible activities* (which may be carried out by individuals or partners):

- There can be advantages in everyone having, at first, *the same issue* of one newspaper; then the pages can be turned over, read, and discussed together.
- The most elementary division in newspapers is between *news*, *pictures*, and *advertisements*—what proportion of each? For which of these do people buy newspapers?
- *The advertisements* are of several kinds and forms. Encourage some initial attempts to distinguish differences. Placement of ads is also important. What are the best, most eye-catching positions?
- The term *pictures* covers many forms of illustration. What are they? How many photos per page? Would more pictures be appreciated? Of what? Why aren't there more pictures?
- What at first is called *news* turns out on closer inspection to include many items and articles besides news reports. Make a list of the various kinds of items and articles, e.g. Australian news, overseas news, feature articles, editorials, business reports, reviews (of books, films, TV shows), sports news and comment, special columns, letters-to-the-editor.
- Perhaps distinguish between 'hard' and 'soft' news. *Hard news* is serious reporting of events in politics, economy, foreign affairs and other areas which affect many people. *Soft news* tends to be inserted more for the readers' entertainment than for their enlightenment, e.g. the doings of celebrities, the page 3 glamour girl, animal stories, or a dramatic crime or accident.
- Perhaps compare a *tabloid* newspaper with a *broadsheet*. Although in some countries they can be equally serious, in Australia there is a tendency for the 'broadsheet' to be generally serious in content while the 'tabloid' is relatively shallow, popular in tone, often sensational, and full of soft rather than hard news.
- Ask pupils to take responsibility for preparing a noticeboard, chart or scrapbook on one of the special areas of newspapers mentioned above.
- Or ask everyone to prepare a scrapbook which devotes each page-opening to cuttings representative of a section or area of newspaper interests.

The previous activities will have aroused interest in newspaper language, beginning with headlines. Qualities of good headlines? At least—

an eye-catching position on the page;
bright, interest-arousing phrasing;
an accurate pointer to the story;
short words preferred to long.

Here are some possible activities with headlines (useful in building skill for writing sub-heads during personal note-making):

- Cut out headlines which meet the standard of 'bright, interest-arousing phrasing' and paste them on a poster-size sheet to make a collage.
- Prepare ten newspaper article 'leads' (or brief news items), read each to the class and ask pupils to turn the key idea into a headline, e.g. 'Joan

Sutherland has accepted an invitation to sing at this year's Adelaide Festival' —*Sutherland to sing at Festival*; or 'The two prisoners who escaped from Pentridge have slipped through the police cordon which was tightening around them'—*Escapees evade police net*, or perhaps *Escapees give police the slip.*

- The headline writer, a sub-editor, values short words over long. Make a list of long words and ask pupils to find shorter matching words (synonyms), e.g.
  - approximately (*about*)
  - endeavour (*try*)
  - commence (*start*)
  - substantial (*large*)
  - demonstrate (*show*)
  - prevent (*stop*)
  - stimulate (*boost*)
  - request (*ask*)
  - discover (*find*)
  - difficult (*hard*)
- Discuss the meaning of 'sensational', 'misleading' and 'confusing' headlines. Obviously they are inaccurate pointers to the stories they precede. Children can find it amusing to write a sensational headline then follow it with a relatively simple, straightforward news item.

After an investigation by his group, nine year old Ben reports on the work of the sports journalist, with special attention to 'the language of the back page'.

Ask everyone to cut an interesting news report (not a feature article) from a paper. Then ask them: (1) to check its information by applying the 5Ws of journalism, i.e. does the report answer a reader's desire to be told *Who? What? Where? When? Why?* (or *How?*); and (2) has the report been constructed on the 'inverted pyramid' principle, i.e. the 'lead' or 'intro' states the most important point, and the later paragraphs provide information in descending order of importance so that the sub-editor can simply 'cut' from the end, if space is short, without spoiling the main story?

. . . Apply the two tests several times in order to learn the style of news reporting. Finally, take a well-known fairy tale or nursery rhyme, such as 'Little Miss Muffet', and enjoy reporting it matter-of-factly as a news item.

Having read a large number of news reports in papers and carried out the activities of Probe 4, the class can simulate the reporting staff of a major newspaper. The teacher as Editor asks the 'staff' to search out and report news. The 'reporters' can either make their own choice (or discovery) of news, e.g. a recent school event or family event, or they can imagine an event from sources such as these:

another fairy tale or nursery rhyme;
a win or accident at school;
a visit by a V.I.P. to the school;
a dramatic neighbourhood event;
a report of an interview with someone.

Remember, the aim is to sense a distinctive style (or 'register') of language use—the plain, matter-of-fact, clear language of good reporting, presented in the 'inverted pyramid' sequence.

Appoint three pupils who will devise a story on how they were present when they saw a man force his way into the Principal's car and drive it off, how they had answered police questions about what they had seen, and how a call had been broadcast for sightings of the stolen vehicle—everyone to write this up as a news report . . . The three can be questioned for details by the class (the 'reporters'), who will make notes and then write up a news report for tomorrow's paper. Much can be learnt from comparing the accounts. It is an exercise which stresses attention to detail, especially in accurately describing both the car and the thief.

The class can carry out further reporting assignments of the kinds suggested in Probes 5-6. While that is proceeding, direct attention to 'What makes a good newspaper photograph?' Discuss this question. Ask everyone to cut out and bring to school ten action photos from past newspapers. Pool these, then deal out ten to each pupil, but ensure first that the captions have been removed.

Newspaper study in team teaching conditions. Groups, partners and individuals proceed with their researches while one teacher (background) discusses work presented by a group and the other joins a group which is examining the contents of a 'broadsheet' newspaper.

Ask each pupil to select the five or six best photos and write captions for each. Because the photos are now out of their newspaper context, the pupil will have to write longer than usual captions telling (if necessary, imagining):

WHO is in the picture;
WHAT is happening;
WHERE and WHEN;
WHY (or HOW) it came about.
Make a classroom display of the best work.

These are some of the more prominent entertainment features of newspapers. Discuss them, and get impressions of parents' attitudes to them.

- Ask the children to collect 'The Best of Comic Strip Humour', and put together a class anthology. It will become popular reading.
- Encourage reading of books of high quality newspaper strips such as 'Peanuts'. Discuss why they have become popular.
- Almost every class has at least a few pupils capable of telling a joke in comic form—encourage the circulation of such work. Applaud rigour

shown in composing concise 'speech-bubbles'.

- Collect and display cartoons which have been found amusing or interesting by the children. Compare photos of well-known people with their cartoons — how has the cartoonist achieved this effect with just a few clever strokes?
- Show the class how to compose a simple crossword, and encourage efforts to do so.
- Sample opinions on the reliability of the daily 'Your Life by the Stars' columns.

Collect some short, interesting letters. Discuss topics commonly written about by writers of such letters. How do the letters-pages differ from paper to paper? What are the general characteristics of letters that are printed (e.g. topical, brief, bright). Discuss the quality of arguments in several letters. Put a classroom 'Letters Page' on display. Find out about the letter column of a local newspaper, then discuss a topic of local interest and write a collective letter to the Editor (e.g. the class might unanimously agree on the need for traffic-lights at a certain intersection, or tree-planting along a street near the school, or a conservation issue). The letter can be signed by a representative pupil 'on behalf of 27 pupils of class 5HD'. Urge individuals to write further letters to this or other papers, on subjects of their own choosing.

These youthful 'Editors' have received a batch of 'letters-to-the-editor' and they are working on a selection which will be published. They will also report to the class on why they chose some and rejected others.

This study could easily become a large one, but it need not be attempted in depth. Ask, 'What are the similarities and differences between newspaper and TV advertisements?' This can be a good thinking exercise—in thinking out ideas, expressing them in writing, and arranging them effectively on the page. Worth stressing is the completely obtrusive nature of TV ads, for the show stops and the ad is forced on the attention of the viewer, whereas most ads in a newspaper need to be looked for voluntarily by the reader, and those that are on news pages can be easily ignored. (When pupils have completed and presented their comparisons, the study of newspaper advertising might proceed, if a detailed study is required, along lines suggested by the 30 probes on TV advertising.)

Pursue the study of newspaper advertising by asking everyone to collect, say, twenty ads which show *variety*, ten of these to be from the 'general' section of the paper and ten from the 'classified' section. Concentrate attention on the latter—the small, usually single-column ads which mostly offer some thing or service for sale or hire. Note that the informativeness of the small 'classifieds' often contrasts with the emotional, less informative character of many large ads. Everyone at some time needs to insert a 'classified' ad. Ask the children to draw up, say, three ads for different areas of the classified pages, e.g. 'Lost and Found' (a dog), 'For Sale' (a bike), 'Real Estate for Sale' (pupil's own home). Brief but accurate description is demanded, if only by the fact that the cost of each word is high.

Having perused the larger ads that appear in newspapers and magazines, ask each child to settle for three which will serve broadly as models for ads they will write themselves. Some possibilities: (1) list the school tuckshop's main products and prices then produce an ad similar to the full-page ones presented by the major supermarket chains; (2) draw up an ad promoting a real or imaginary play or concert which the school is to present; (3) choose an outstanding book, and write an ad which will sell it; (4) if the class has produced a number of child-authored books, do an ad which offers them for sale; (5) think out the main attractions of the school library and present them in a full-page ad.

In recent years the term 'register' has become popular for describing the way a writer (or speaker) uses language to suit the demands of a specific task—that is, makes it appropriate to a given purpose, medium, and audience. We have already discussed above the 'registers' appropriate to headline writing (Probe 3), news reporting (Probes 4-5-6), letters-to-the-editor (Probe 9), classified

ads (Probe 11), and general ads (Probe 12). Newspapers offer other 'registers' which may be studied, including:

- *Editorials:* dignified writing, a high moral tone, convinced of knowing exactly what the world should be doing.
- *Columns:* whatever the nature of the column, the tone will be personal, conversational, colloquial (usually in a good sense).
- *Sports Pages:* usually plain, direct writing, professing familiarity with performers and teams, sometimes slipping into cliches ('bone-crushing tackle', 'whirlwind finish').
- *TV Reviewing:* a tone that swings between with-it excitement and wry humour or mocking disapproval.
- *Business Analysis:* usually good serious, straightforward journalistic writing, comparable to the good writing of the feature pages.

Let the whole class set up as a newspaper enterprise. The personnel may be allotted numerous tasks, e.g. proprietor (the teacher?), managing editor, subeditors, journalists including reporters and feature writers, photographers, illustrators, cartoonists, advertising designers, production manager and assistants, sales persons, despatch clerks. More simply, an Editorial Office of three can allocate tasks, receive the writing, etc., edit it, and produce the paper.

- Use what has been learnt so far to produce a class newspaper, either a single copy of it or a 'printed' one in multicopies.
- Possible themes: a 'Good News' paper; or 'Class Doings'; or 'Australia Welcomes Space Visitors', or 'Our Locality'.

Other, and often more difficult, studies of newspapers are possible. For example:

15.1: Language Studies: Explore any of the areas suggested in Probe 13, or study the meaning of the term 'journalese', an inferior style of journalism, and find examples in newspapers of its overused words and phrases.

15.2: Invite a Guest: Invite the proprietor of a local newspaper, or a reporter, to answer questions about the paper. Prepare thoroughly for the visit. Everyone can write an account of the interview.

15.3: Excursion to a Printery: Arrange an excursion to a newspaper or at least to a printery to learn about the printing process and observe it in action.

15.4: Study the World Scene: Use overseas stories in recent newspapers (and on TV) to send the class on a study of important areas of the world. Use maps, a globe, travel books, brochures, etc. Thus link geography with the news.

15.5: Study Weather Charts: Some newspapers provide excellent coverage of the weather. Give practice in reading maps and forecasts. Watch the forecasters' accuracy over the period of a week or month.

15.6: Compare Two Newspapers: Especially compare a morning with an evening paper, and a 'tabloid' with a 'broadsheet'. But also, if possible, compare two morning papers, or two evening papers, noting similarities as well as differences.

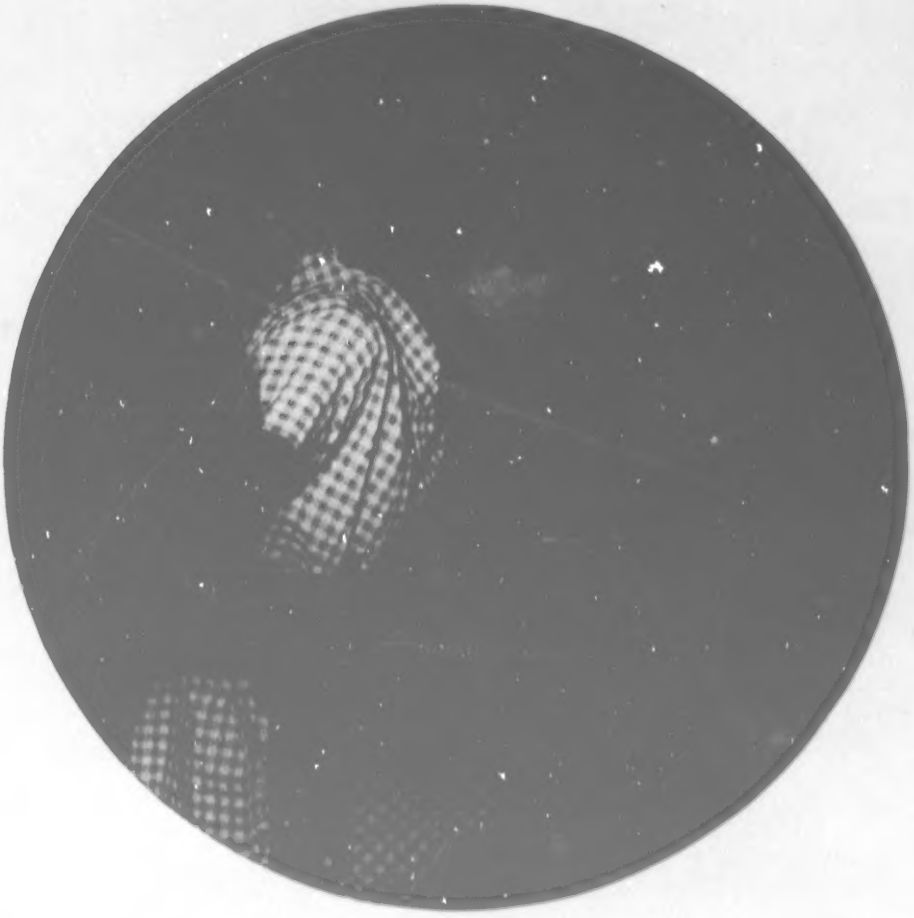
'Look at the photos and tell me what this story might be about.' Teacher Kathy Hohnen discusses a magazine article with her Year Four class.

15.7: Compare a Newspaper and a Magazine: Especially compare a newspaper with one of the big circulation magazines, e.g. *Women's Weekly* or *Woman's Day*.

15.8: Freedom of the Press: What does this mean? How important is it? If we should all prize it, have the newspapers also a responsibility to defend the freedoms of other institutions and people?

15.9: Too Few Newspapers? Why are there so few major newspapers? Who owns them? How much would it cost to launch a new daily paper? Is the daily press in too few hands? What are the dangers of this?

15.10: Too Much Bad News? Are people more interested in bad than good news? Why? What 'good news' might readers like to hear more about? Should the government launch a 'good news' newspaper?



Lynda has completed a study of feature articles and now is writing an article of her own for the class magazine.

15.11: History of Newspapers. As a research project, explore the interesting early history of the press, especially in England; and how newspapers were established in Australia. The history of the press in the United States is no less interesting. Finally, try to form a broad impression of the importance of the press in the 20th century and the impact on it, first, of radio and, second, of television. Why are many newspapers finding survival difficult in the 1980s?

15.12: Do the Mass Media Present the Real World? If a more senior class has spent some time exploring copies of recent newspapers, extend 15.10 by asking, 'Does the press accurately reflect the real world?' Later, extend the discussion further by asking for comparison with the world as presented by television. Only broad impressions are needed, especially ones that challenge the children to think introspectively ('To what extent have the media fashioned

my view of the world?') The teacher may take into account this opinion:

> 'Most students go through their classes as if in a dream. They are bemused by daily interaction as if *it* were the unreality. Many of them live for the spectacle of the television show, the rock concert, the record party, and other mass cultural activities. The spectacle appears as the real world in which they wake up and participate in the process of living, and their non-media life is the fiction.'—Stanley Aronowitz, *College English* (NCTE), April 1977, p. 772.

15.13: Many Questions for Discussion, Debate, Research. Apart from the potential for discussion in all the issues so far raised, many other questions can engage the interest of the more thoughtful children in upper years. A handful of examples:

- Should the press be allowed to criticise the government?
- Why not get rid of privately owned newspapers and just have one good government-run paper?
- Are today's newspapers fair and unbiased—what do adults in general, and politicians in particular, think about this?
- Do people deserve better newspapers than they now have, or are the papers as good as they deserve?
- How can we possibly expect to get a fair, balanced, representative sampling of the news when the whole modern world is suffering from 'information overload'—'infoglut'!?

15.14: An Ongoing School or Class Magazine or Newspaper? The time to launch such a venture could be at any high point of interest in media studies. It will exhibit the best writing of pupils (fully corrected editorially, and neatly rewritten or typed). Editing and production can be in the hands of a small, enthusiastic group, guided by a teacher. Not everything can be published, but even to be 'considered for publication' is an honour. When published the paper becomes a model which will be read, discussed, criticised and emulated in further writing. (If such a venture is launched by a single class instead of being supported by all the school's resources, it should be kept simple so as not to present heavy, recurring production problems.)

15.15: A Christmas Journal/Newspaper. In the final term, try to pull together the year's media study by writing and 'publishing' what could in practice be a blend of newspaper and magazine—news items, newspaper and magazine features, and articles on any subject across-the-curriculum.

HE CLAIMS HE'S SOLVED THE MOTIVATION PROBLEM.
DAD.

5
Programming

Ways to Program Media Studies

There are, of course, many ways you might program the Media strand of your year's work . . .

• Where can I find time for Media Studies?
Everyone knows the curriculum is already overloaded, yet study of the mass media, and especially of TV, is so immensely important that time must be found for it. If you can't simply add a Media Studies course to all the other 'subjects' you've been teaching, then these studies must be integrated into those 'subjects' right across the curriculum—as legitimate subject-matter which can appropriately be taught as part of Reading, Writing, Talking-Listening, Social Studies, Science, Maths, Art and other work. (See also p. 19.)

• Will this book help me to program Media Studies?
The book is sequenced to help you program in whichever of several ways suits your classroom:

ONE POSSIBILITY: Simply follow the sequence of Probes as the book presents them, adapting each to your class's needs.

SECOND POSSIBILITY: Because there are likely to be too many Probes for the time you can find, you might choose: (a) to concentrate on TV as the medium of greatest influence, or (b) to select some only of the Probes from the four main areas, TV, Advertising, Radio, Newspapers.

N.B. The book is arranged in multiples of three—to suit the three terms of the school year, e.g. the 30 TV Probes can be programmed at 10 per term; the 15 Radio Probes at 5 per term; and the 15 Newspaper Probes at 5 per term. Also available are 30 Probes on TV Advertising and 15 further studies of Newspapers. A total of 105. And there are 9 Letters to Parents, suggesting that three be sent out each term.

• Will the book help if I want to launch several major integrated units on special Media themes throughout the year?
We believe it will. Its Contents pages will suggest topics for your major themes, and these pages and the Index will lead you to a good deal of information on many of the themes you are likely to choose.

On the next page we offer a very detailed sample outline of an Integrated Unit. Such a unit is best developed jointly with your pupils, the activities being 'negotiated' or 'contracted' with individuals, pairs or small groups. (The *detail* is necessary for our exposition, but in classroom practice you would not need to be so explicit.)

Sample: Programming an Integrated Unit

Unit Topic: *HUMOUR IN THE MEDIA*

Step 1 **Justification** (Why is the topic worth exploring?)

- Children are drawn to media humour (especially on television); its study, therefore, is strongly motivating.
- It provides opportunities for the study of a number of media conventions (e.g. the 'laugh track' on television).
- It lends itself to a variety of activities that require pupils to investigate, communicate and express themselves.

Step 2 **Questions** (How can the problem be formulated?)

A Central or Focus Question: How do the media communicate humour?
Contributing Questions (some will come from whole-class brainstorming, others will be generated later by the ongoing work; the initial questions can be displayed on a chart with room for additions to be made):

- What makes television cartoons funny?
- How are they similar/different to comic strips?
- How and why is humour used in advertising?
- What kinds of humour are found in newspapers?
- What kinds of humour are heard on radio?
- Can media humour be damaging to some people?

Step 3 **Intended Outcomes** (What should the unit achieve?)

(1) *Knowledge to be gained*

- That humour is important in everyone's life.
- That some media make great use of humour.
- That each medium has its way of presenting humour.

(2) *Values to be emphasised*

- That humour is worth promoting.
- That different tastes in humour should be tolerated.
- That humour shouldn't be at others' expense.

(3) *Concepts to be developed*

- That humour has many varieties.
- That humour is mostly 'the unexpected' (association).
- That 'brevity is the soul of wit'.

(4) *Skills to be acquired or improved*

- Only the teacher can nominate a few skills that are currently relevant to this class from among the vast array of skills of talking, listening, reading, writing, researching, thinking, and using media equipment. One way of deciding on currently important skills is to think them out in terms of (a) skills of investigation, such as planning, observing and researching, and (b) skills of self-expression and communication, such as oral, literate, craft, and A/V skills.

(5) *Productions to be encouraged*

- Create and present humorous ads.
- Similarly, cartoons and comic strips.
- Gather 'Humour from the Media' into a class book.

Step 4 **Resources** (What can be mobilised quickly?)

- Real TV, real radio, real newspapers and magazines.
- Real advertisements from all media.
- School library: list what is available.
- Parents/community: children to survey them.

Step 5 **Learning Activities** (What will the children do?)

Involve the children in planning these, and allow them a good deal of freedom in undertaking work. *Possible activities*:

(1) Some TV programs with a comedy element are recorded in front of a studio audience. But most are not, and they have 'canned laughter' added from a *laugh track* after the show has been filmed. TV cartoons always have 'canned laughter' added. Ask the children to look for examples of both kinds of laughter and discuss their effectiveness.

(2) Class discussion: How important is the laugh track? If a TV comedy had neither a studio audience nor a laugh track, would it seem less funny?

(3) The class brainstorms the names of humorous TV shows. A classification is then decided upon and the name of each show is entered under a heading (e.g. Comedy About Family Life, Comedy About Army Life, Cartoons, Variety . . .).

(4) Select TV or radio advertisements that rely heavily on making a humorous impact. What techniques are used—dialogue, movement, sound-effects, situation created . . .?

(5) Collect newspaper display advertisements that contain an element of humour. Discuss the approach used.

(6) Collect newspaper stories that have a humorous touch. Comment on what makes each amusing—a sense of the ridiculous, an unexpected ending, sheer confusion . . .?

(7) Study some comic strips. Children rewrite the dialogue in the speech bubbles, trying not to lose the humour. The original dialogue is rewritten in normal prose. Does this version lose the humorous effect? Explain.

(8) Collect political cartoons and discuss the methods used by cartoonists—the exaggeration of facial characteristics, etc. Make a collection of cartoons of well-known political figures and match these with newspaper photographs of the same people.

(9) Brainstorm and list the names of 'funny' people appearing on television. Children make one or two comments on each, trying to catch something of their projected character and type of humour.

(10) The class researches how humour on TV affects everyday life. Are there expressions or behaviours in common use that have their origin on TV (e.g. consider the program 'Happy Days')?

Step 6 **Evaluation** (How to assist the class and individuals?)

Evaluation is continuous throughout the unit, including scribbled observations of each pupil for an 'anecdotal profile', and retaining of work samples.

- What has the class learnt from the unit?
- How can the unit be improved next year?
- Has this unit led to further topics we can study?
- What opinions do the children have of the unit?

BUT MRS SKINNER, HE THINKS IT'S A PERSON!
SCHOOL OFFICE
My best frend

6
Letters

Letters to Parents about the Media

Introduction

Regular communication with parents about what is happening in a class studying the mass media is essential:

First, BECAUSE the school alone can't control the mass media curriculum—most of it is, of course, dispensed in the home by the parents' TV set, radio, newspapers and magazines.

Second, BECAUSE classroom study of the media involves asking the children questions about what happens at home—about their parents' media habits, opinions and values.

Third, BECAUSE children learn best when they perceive a strong home-and-school partnership—which won't emerge in this area until the school explains the value of media studies to parents, many of whom are accustomed to value only traditional 'book learning'.

Accordingly, nine suggestions follow (three per term?) for informing parents. They are presented as letters but may be adapted for inclusion in a bulletin or newsletter. (We have expressed them as simply as we can for a general readership, but you will know whether further simplification is necessary for some of your parents.)

'Curriculum developments will be more successful if introduced with the understanding and support of parents and the community at large. In an area as sensitive and pervasive as mass media, it is essential that this interaction occurs.'

—Media Policy Statement, NSW Department of Education.

Sample 1

Dear Parent

Today, Children's Studies Must Include the Media

During this term your child may have some unusual homework—watching a TV program, taking notes during a commercial, or even interviewing family members about their favourite newspaper or radio station.

Don't be alarmed! These will all be necessary parts of a study of the main 'mass media', namely TV, radio and newspapers.

But why study the media? All over Australia, education systems both government and non-government are urging schools to assist pupils to become critical, well-informed individuals able to choose intelligently the best programs from the media's vast daily offering. The same is happening in Britain and the United States.

Whether we like it or not, our children are being educated not only by the school but by the media. The average child, for instance, spends as much time over a year in watching television as he or she spends in the classroom. In fact, on leaving school, the typical Australian child will have spent about 12,000 hours in front of teachers and at least 15,000 hours in front of television sets. *And every moment of viewing has taught something—for good or ill!*

That's just one reason why all of us have to take media education seriously. It is a very important part of every child's education.

As the weeks pass we'll be sending information home to you about our Mass Media Study program. We feel sure you will support the school's efforts.

Yours sincerely

Sample 2

Dear Parent

What Effect Does Television Have on Children?

As a result of our Mass Media Study program, a number of parents have asked about the effects television-viewing has on children.

There is no simple answer.

Certainly children owe much to *good* TV programs. The pity is that there aren't more of them. Over the years such programs serve to stimulate the children's interest in the wider world and to deepen their understanding of people.

On the negative side, television can encourage children to be passive—obviously so when they watch it for long hours! More subtly, it can coax them away from such essential activities as conversation, play, hobbies, reading, writing and study. It can also teach 'values' that we—parents and teachers—find quite unacceptable.

Research tells us that the children least affected negatively by TV-viewing are those

who find life interesting,
who get on well with others,
who enjoy school and games,
who feel wanted and loved, and
who don't watch excessively long hours of TV.

It seems that the best way to help our children is to see that they have a *varied* life which extends to *many activities* and so keeps passive TV-viewing in proportion as but one valued element in a balanced, satisfying childhood.

Yours sincerely

Sample 3

Dear Parent

Talking about TV Starts Children Thinking

As part of our program of Media Study, we are asking the children to discuss favourite TV shows with their parents.

Because so much information and entertainment pours continually through the TV set, it becomes important that parents should communicate with their children about at least some of the programs.

Here are a number of questions that might be raised with your child about popular TV programs:

1. How do the people in this show live, and how do they get on with each other? What are the important things in life for them? Do members of our family think the same way? (In other words, how do *their* values compare with *ours*?)
2. Do disagreements and conflicts often occur in this show? How do the characters handle them? By physical violence? By quarrelling? By discussion? . . . What are the best ways of solving problems of this kind?
3. Is it a funny show? Does it have the kinds of jokes and situations that everyone can laugh at? Or are we laughing because someone is being made to feel bad?
4. Who are the heroes in the show? Who do the wrong things? Who are the clever ones and who are the stupid ones? Are the important people always men? Always American? Always of a certain type? Is that what real life is like?

Yours sincerely

[*N.B. For more junior classes, the questions can be simpler, e.g.*

1. What is your favourite program?
2. Who is your favourite TV person?
3. What do you like best about him/her?
4. What sort of programs do you like best—cartoons, funny shows, family shows, shows about policemen . . .?
5. What are the programs your friends like watching?
6. If you could go on television, which show would you like to be in? Why?]

Sample 4

Dear Parent

'Not the News again! Can't we watch *Sons & Daughters*?'

Sound familiar? Every family has its disputes about what to watch—at least until an agreement is worked out about how to share the TV set. The agreement needs to be based on the parents' understanding of healthy TV-viewing habits.

One suggestion worth trying is to have a family meeting which draws up its own rules for the use of the set. Here is the result of one family's discussion. You might find it a useful base on which your family can work out a list of rules suited to your particular circumstances.

One Family's TV Rules

1. The TV's normal state is OFF. It stays this way until we decide there is something we really want to watch.
2. We use a TV-guide to plan each week's viewing, taking into account that different members of the family sometimes have different preferences. When there is a clash of preferences, Mum and Dad make the final decision.
3. No week-day morning TV—attention is on school and work.
4. One hour of selected after-school TV—leaving time for activities such as play, hobbies or homework.
5. No viewing during meals, because meals are occasions for family conversation.
6. Homework cannot be done effectively in front of TV.
7. It is simple courtesy to turn off TV when visitors arrive.
8. One night a week—just one night!—is our special family night. We go out together, or we play family games, or we visit the library and when we get home just sit around reading and talking.
9. We accept Mum and Dad's opinion that some programs are not suitable for viewing because of violence or bad taste.
10. We regularly review the way we use our time, especially the way we use it at week-ends—and so we get a good balance of many activities of which TV is only one.

Yours sincerely

Sample 5

Dear Parent

Can TV Be Harmful?

The school's Mass Media program is attempting throughout the year to show the children that while there are some good TV shows, there are others which promote violence, vulgarity and other anti-social behaviour.

We hope you will add your critical opinions to ours in condemning such shows.

Meanwhile, we have accumulated a list of simple, sensible 'Health Tips' which are worth noting. We shall tell them to the children at school and now we pass them on to you so that you can remind your child of them if the need arises:

- *Eyes* — Don't sit close to the set.
  — Don't watch in a completely dark room; have a light on.
  — Don't wear sunglasses while watching.
  — Don't have glare on the screen from a window or light.
- *Ears* — Don't turn the sound above normal speech levels.
- *Posture* — Don't slump, with badly curved spine and sagging head; sit comfortably erect on a reasonably firm chair, perhaps with your back supported by cushions, and both feet on the floor.
- *Breathing* — Don't tolerate a poorly ventilated room; nor a smoky one.
- *Nutrition* — Don't be a 'TV nibbler' — certainly, don't nibble rubbish.
- *Sleep* — Don't watch TV excessively — and don't lose sleep over it.

And here is an argument for *moderation in TV-viewing*:
'Too much of any good thing becomes harmful . . .
— *food* is good but too much makes us sick;
— *exercise* is good but too much makes us tired;
— *light* is necessary to seeing but too much hurts the eyes;
— *sound* is necessary to hearing but too much damages the ears;
— *car travel* is enjoyable but too much makes us weary;
— *TELEVISION* is enjoyable but too much makes us dull and passive.'

Remember the wise old saying: *'Moderation in all things!'*

Yours sincerely

Sample 6

Dear Parent

Ways the Home Can Support the School's Media Program

Our Mass Media program aims at helping the children become more thoughtful and critical—as viewers of TV, listeners to radio, readers of newspapers and magazines.

Here are some ways in which you might support the program at home:

1. Occasionally look through the newspaper with your child. Talk about certain news items and pictures. Ask what he or she has learnt about newspapers at school.
2. Talk about your favourite radio program. Explain how radio can be a good companion in the car or while doing household chores. Again, invite information about what has been learnt at school regarding radio.
3. Encourage your child to follow a particular news story as it unfolds day by day. Be careful to select one that is likely to capture a child's interest.
4. Every time you decide that a particular TV show is not suitable for children, *explain why*. The explanation is important in helping your child develop a set of decent values.
5. Sometimes join your child in watching a favourite TV program. Show interest in talking about it, and ask questions which encourage the expression of opinions and the finding of reasons to support the opinions.
6. Talk about advertisements and TV commercials. What methods of persuasion are the advertisers using? Ask your child about these; you might be surprised at the insight shown by the answers.

Yours sincerely

Sample 7

Dear Parent

TV Ads Educate Children in a Spending Lifestyle

Someone said, 'TV brings us two kinds of news: *bad news* through the evening news bulletin, *good news* through the never-ending ads.'

But in our Media Study program, we've been looking at TV advertising—and the ads turn out NOT to be good news at all!

Those happy, lively, colourful ads—your child will have watched 350,000 of them by age 18! They serve to educate (or train) today's young people in a spending lifestyle; they train them to be uncritical and preferably impulsive consumers.

So the school's media studies are trying to teach children self-defence in the face of TV's continual advertising push. *To give one example:*

The children have been studying the techniques of advertising food and drink, especially the 'fast foods' and 'junk foods' which mostly have unhealthy concentrations of sugar, salt or fat.

You can help by encouraging discussion of such techniques. What, for instance, is the thinking behind a popular soft drink ad? What is being offered apart from the (undisclosed) ingredients? . . . happiness? sophistication? the 'fun crowd'? life itself?

At such moments, it could be appropriate to switch attention from the dream world created by television to the real healthy diet of your home—the poultry, fish, cheese, milk, cereals, vegetables, salads, fruit, and so on, which *do* improve complexion and a sense of well-being . . . *Ads don't add life!*

Yours sincerely

Sample 8

Dear Parent

Too Much Violence on TV?

Does the amount of TV violence worry you?

An Australian authority on the mass media, Kevin Tindall, says the average child watches in excess of five acts of violence *per hour*!

You might amuse yourself by estimating how many hours of TV your child will watch this year and then multiply the figure by five to see how many acts of violence will be absorbed in this year alone . . .

But it isn't funny, is it? It must be having some effect on your child.

People who take comfort in the thought that, 'It's only TV', or 'Children can distinguish between televised violence and the real thing' are ignoring the fact that TV does obviously influence people's behaviour—if it doesn't, why do advertisers eagerly spend millions of dollars confident in the knowledge that they *can* influence behaviour, often at unconscious levels?

In the school's Media program, we are trying to show that TV's excessive stress on violence can certainly have negative effects on viewers, e.g.

- *Violence Blunts Sensitivity*—the viewer ceases to feel humanly horrified by it.
- *Violence Implants Anxiety*—the viewer's fears, anxieties and dreams, below consciousness, are intensified.
- *Violence Teaches a Wrong Way to Solve Problems*—the viewer sees violence, not reasoning, as the way to get results.
- *Violence Undermines Belief in Adult Reasonableness*—the viewer sees adults so often setting an appalling example!

It is true that there are many violent acts in the world today, but it is also true that TV hugely emphasises these while failing to show a balance of kindly and caring acts.

Will you help us to make this *balance* clear to your child? Will you help your child to choose the non-violent or less-violent programs? And if you belong to a public organisation (a parents, or political, or church, or union group), will you find out what its policy is on TV violence and support it or call for further action?

Yours sincerely

N.B. See p. 59 for ideas on 'Can TV Be Changed for the Better?'

Sample 9

Dear Parent

How Can TV be Kept in Its Place?

Throughout the school's Media Study program this year, we have tried to show that a balanced, satisfying childhood depends on having *varied activities*, among which TV-viewing is only one.

Whenever we attempt to list what those 'varied activities' might be, we are amazed at the many options available.

Here is a *short list* of such options for your consideration. Please do not think we are especially advocating any or all of them. Each is simply an option that some family has chosen.

- Each day's TV programs should be *selected*, not just happen.
- Children sometimes need help in selecting their programs.
- There need to be times for watching as a family.
- No TV is watched on week-day mornings, at mealtimes, or when visitors call.
- Homework is never done in front of TV.
- There is only one hour of selected after-school TV, leaving time for play, hobbies, caring for pets, or homework.
- ABC-TV and O-28 have the advantage of being free of commercial advertising.
- Radio offers many good programs, but they need to be *selected* no less than TV programs.
- A video enables shows to be carefully selected.
- A home computer offers opportunities for entertainment, learning, and creative composing.

BUT beyond all the 'electronic' choices above, there are the wider options life offers . . .

- Family activities, visits, and outings.
- Activities of children with their friends.
- Exercise and sports.
- Reading, in all its great variety.
- Pursuit of a craft, art, or musical instrument.
- Home study.
- Religious observance, church fellowship.

Yours sincerely

'A generation ago television was introduced into the Australian home. Today almost every child grows up in a culture saturated by television. Just as we are sure that every day we will eat and sleep, the likelihood is that we will also watch television. We will watch murder, mayhem, and conflict. Most of the news will be bad news, most of the laughter canned. Through it all will run thousands upon thousands of commercial messages.'

Patricia Edgar, Chairman
Children's Program Committee
Australian Broadcasting Tribunal
(*Education News*, Vol. 16, No. 11, 1979)

Many school libraries now devote a special section to media studies and so encourage the work of young researchers. As well as books about the media, there are often piles of 'print media' — newspapers, magazines, and advertising brochures.

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(1) The Mass Media Themselves
(2) Curriculum Aids
(3) References for Teachers
Books
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Articles in 'Education News'
(4) References for Pupils

(1) The Mass Media Themselves

Television programs, Radio programs, Newspapers and Magazines—including all their packed-with-promise Advertisements—these are the prime source materials of any study of the mass media, inviting pupils to 'read' them, not passively, but in a spirit of critical inquiry which produces self-expression and communication.

(2) Curriculum Aids

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LEARNING TO READ THE MEDIA

Q. The modern mass media, especially TV, are in fact an 'alternative curriculum' which competes every day for children's attention. How can the school curriculum, already overloaded, match this competition by introducing critical 'media studies' - as is so often advocated?

A. This book offers a workable approach to 'media studies' - 105 units ('probes') which readily slot into term time

- **30 units on Television - 10 per term;**
- **30 units on TV advertising - 10 per term;**
- **15 units on Radio - 5 per term;**
- **30 units on Newspapers - 10 per term.**

Also 9 letters to parents - 3 per term.

The book is adaptable to your scheme of programming: you simply follow its sequence of units;
OR rearrange the units in a different order;
OR concentrate on children's main area of interest, TV:
OR select some units from each of the four areas;
OR extract material for specific large integrated studies.

Barry Dwyer taught in primary and high schools and was a school counsellor and teachers college lecturer before taking up his present appointment within the Catholic education system. For ten years he contributed a weekly educational column to a Sydney newspaper, and he has been involved in numerous radio and TV programs. He frequently addresses parent meetings on school and childhood problems. He is co-author of three well-known books: *Mastering the Media* (1971, 1976), *Meeting the Media* (1973), and *K-6: Best Years of Their Lives?* (1979). He has been president of PETA since 1980.

R.D. (Bob) Walshe had many years as a secondary teacher of English and History, followed by periods as a publisher, editor, and teacher of writing to adults. He has written or co-authored a number of books including *Mastering Words, Mastering English, World History Since 1789, How to Study Better*, and more recently he has written *Better Writing, Clearer Thinking* (1979) and *Every Child Can Write* (1981), while his edited works include *My Machine Makes Rainbows* (1972), *Speaking of Writing* (1975), and *Donald Graves in Australia* (1981). From 1972 to March 1984 he served as PETA's first (honorary) Publications Editor.

PETA

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